

MARCHING MINSTREL

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MARCHING MINSTREL

By VIOLET CAMPBELL

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PART I
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I

HOW absurd the statue of St. Nicholas looked now, with its head broken off, and that of St. Thomas stuck in its place. The crack showed plainly, moss had already rooted within it: from this green collar the cuckoo head leant backwards, gazing vacantly and at an absurd angle at the tree-tops. Receiving the light thus, obliquely, its features were washed of shape and shadow, the eyes had lost their darkness, the mouth its pity: illumination ruthlessly invading the recesses of expression transformed the saintly face into no more than a resemblance of Jacquot, imbecile child of the village.

Beneath this somewhat dubious capital, the stone robes of St. Nicholas fell in vertical lines; firmly below them his pointed toes trod the pedestal strewn with offerings —roses, rosemary, sweet-smelling herbs, mulberries, bunches of grapes. In the hollow at the gates of the village he stood, stained blue one-half his height with the shadow of the old Moorish fort. The declining sunlight outlined the ruined bastions, and, slanting forwards, gilded St. Thomas-Nicholas with a majestic halo.

All at once the people observed this. The old peasant, Jean Lafitte, fell mumbling upon his knees. Poor man, he was almost trodden underfoot by the delighted populace. Up and round they surged, laughing, shouting, dancing, ringing the pedestal, drunk with happiness and rejoicing.

Indeed, they had cause for gratitude: and for pride, just legacy of right actions. For had they not revealed their mettle, made evident how they were not to be deceived, they, not to be fobbed off with indolent and

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inferior patrons? Thus, when St. Nicholas, newly installed with religious musics and ceremony, had responded only with a drought whose like had not been known these fifty years, had they not refused, as one man, to suffer such incompetence; and advancing with angry and threatening gestures, themselves decapitated the saint, restoring what, fortunately, was left of his apostolic rival?

And what was the result? Why, as any peasant's child could tell, fine open weather, good crops, little blight, well-ordered floods, record vintage, twenty-three cows bull-calved and fourteen babies born in one village alone. *A bas St. Nicholas! Vive St. Thomas!*

On the left, in a little clearing, to the sound of the shawm and tambourine, people were already dancing. The tune was high, minor, with sustained notes which had no conclusion, sounding only like a delicate wail; the steps of the dancers were tap, tap, tappity, in between the suspended music and holding up the pauses. The turnings and posturings of the figures balanced themselves against the sweeping downcomes of the melody, but in a moment the little nicks in the tune had caught up the feet and whirled them away into the next pose.

On the other side, the scene was equally gay. Here, the peasants had, the day before, cut off the branches from a tall straight tree. Festoons of myrtles and wreaths of roses now were its ornaments, at the top a rope was tied, which, passing over the bough of a tree opposite, descended to the hands of the young man, Henri Cabouchet. In the centre of the rope, between the trees, a live cock had been fastened by its legs. It swung aloft, clapping its wings, and turning round and round. Grinning, the young man, hidden by the tree, paid out the rope: the cock was lowered. At once three or four of the players, with swords, rushed up to spit it. Henri was too quick. The cock flew up instantly on his rope, taut amongst the roses and myrtles. It was difficult for the players to keep an eye on the cock and at the same time on the manœuvres of Henri behind the tree. A

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few feathers were sliced off, a prick or two, a few bright drops of blood, that was all. At last it was young Blouard, with the great bound of a grasshopper, who killed the cock ; it became his prize.

This diversion, newly imported from over the border, pleased and excited everybody. After this they buried a cock up to its neck in the ground, in itself a difficult feat. The frantic struggles of the bird and its two or three escapes proved enormously amusing. This time the players, advancing blindfold, were obliged to strike off the head with one blow. Sometimes the cock would crow, thus guiding his antagonist ; if he were silent, the player had to rely only on the exhortations of the crowd ; all contradictory, and all misleading. Many old scores were paid off by this means. It is certain that nothing makes a man look more ridiculous than being obliged to keep edging away because a sword is on the point of slashing his ankles.

At last all the cocks were killed. This ended the game from Spain, land of the deaths of bulls and horses. Young Henri swarmed up the tree, undid the rope, crowned himself with one of the rose-garlands, and with a song between his teeth joined once more the throng, now noisier than ever.

A bas St. Nicholas ! Vive St. Thomas ! Cheeks glowed, voices rang, hats were flung up, the tide of flowers rose to the stone knees. Somebody pulled out a pipe and started with shrill flutings a staccato tune : at once the gay-coloured dresses swirled out, plump brown forearms linked as the couples revolved. Cha ! cha ! cha ! cried the old men, marking the time.

Under his round black hat Father Dolin looked on. Under his black hat he smiled, tolerantly. "Enjoy yourselves, my children, laugh, feel your life. You inherit a future that cannot even be guessed. All around you France is swelling, history stirring, unheard-of deeds piling glittering upon each other, the young century unfurling like a banner in the wake of the First Consul. Laugh, sing, little ones, remembering your Creator, in

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the happy fields of Provence ! ” Indulgently he watched them. Here was the slim boy Sebastian, leading by a rope through the nose a fine brown bear. No more than the hairy forehead of this creature could be seen above the swarm of children that surrounded it. A little farther squatted Andrea Luquez the Spanish pedlar, the hunch-back. “ Ho, Andrea ! Show up your wares ! ” cried Father Dolin.

Andrea smiled brilliantly ; every one of his teeth showed, even the gums where the teeth were missing. His face was the colour of old walnuts and his brow deeply furrowed from the pull of the band that supported his pack when he travelled.

The pack was open now and resting like a tray before him. What a wonder, this pack of Andrea’s ! The top compartment, laden with coloured toys, braids, buttons, scissors and sweetmeats, could slide in and out like a drawer : this was enchanting, it gave the whole business a supernatural glamour and the buttons and pins a sudden trembling animation : and it was a great honour, too, when Andrea slid it thus for anyone : for behind, in the cavity thus revealed, he kept his very special merchandise. To see, to touch perhaps, that which is not openly exhibited for sale, that is very delightful : to buy, of course, is a different matter. Oh, Andrea, how can we afford so many francs for even the very best velvet or muslin ? This braid with the gold edging—take it away, do not ask us to look at it. Let me, all the same, just see it once more. What, old miser, *can* it not be cheaper ? This paltry, narrow, small one, then, how much to go twice round the skirt and once round the arms and once round the neck ? . . . And what is that in the bottom tray ? Oh, let us, let us see ! A rabbit, a mouse ? Ciel, they move ! Huh ! huh ! Let me out, let me go !—Bon Dieu, how frightened I was. You should not frighten us, Andrea. Do you see, Jacques, ho, Pierre, do you see, ha ha, a toy, a self-moving iron in fur ! How clever, how modern ! Always something new nowadays. Two hundred miles a minute they say the

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world is advancing, the savants. And this yellow silk—what, is it *hair*? Bring it out, Andrea. Aaah! the flaxen doll, the beauty. Ch'k! Ch'k! Come here, Marianne, see the beautiful doll from Brunswick—real feet and hands, see, not cotton knobs. No, do not touch, impious one, Andrea will sell this no doubt to her excellency the Countess, or to the Baroness of Château Flamande. . . .

Father Dolin drew near. He, too, had seen the sunlight sparkle on the brave curls of the Brunswickian. For some time after Andrea had packed it away he stood looking where it had been, in a very curious speculation, stroking and stroking his round blue cheeks. . . .

Moving among the crowd was, of course, Perroguet. As usual, his keen gaze sifted the throng. Craftily he passed through the edges of groups. "In a little, in a little!" he promised, smiling, flashing his eyes. No one knew better than he just how to say this, or to whom: no one knew better which pockets were heaviest or most easily lightened. Already, in a short time, a little crowd was following him.

"Tiens, Perroguet! Hola, mon brave, we have not heard thee since last harvest! Come, rat-a-plan, a lively one!"—"No, no, let's have the conundrum, should a man first kiss the hands of his love or her feet?"—"Or, ha ha, that droll one about the little bird, where the bird sings Trillo, Trillo, and the old man comes in"——"No, no!"—"Yes!"—"No!—Perroguet, for my sake, a nice, lovely, sad one about a lady!"

Perroguet smiled again. He unslung his guitar. When every eye was upon him, he bowed. "I have, my very respected friends," he announced grandiloquently, "a large number of *new* songs. From Portugal, from Spain, from Italy, even from England. Ah, the bitter-sweet chacras of Portugal, the sleepy-soft Italian melodies, the heart-stirring ballads of England! The song of La Dame Fidele a Mort, the ballad of the Cerf Blessé, the new, the *very* new rhyme of the Ten Sisters!"

"The new ones!" clamoured the youths and maidens.

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"The old ones!" shrieked the young children, jumping up and down. "The old ones!" quavered the age-worn voices.

Perroquet bowed once more. He was good at this. All the time the crowd around him was increasing, passers-by attracted by the cries, the excited voices of protest and demand. Interest held the hub of the circle, curiosity its circumference. At last there were enough. Perroquet knew to a moment when to accede: to a yard whither his voice would carry. (Bad to waste breath singing to those out of earshot. Better to gather them up later in another group. . . .)

"For *you*, mademoiselle," he said gracefully, "a nice, lovely, *sad* one!"

He struck a few strings. A slight, mournful melody detached itself. Accompanying the simple notes a rhythm floated, a vibration, rather, that soared or sank with the speakers in the narrative. The coloured crowd was hushed in a moment. They settled themselves in comfortable attitudes. They opened their ears and their hearts, too, in simplicity, to the sad tune and the words.

"Ho, Lady! Look forth: open the gates and lower the bridges:
Let me in with my bowmen, the Lord Balnai has returned.
From the wars has returned the Lord Balnai,
Let the gates fly open, welcome me within thy bower!"

The maidens look forth, the old men peer from the wall:
A company of horsemen, armed, are below the hill.

"Look, Lady, the warriors are returned who went forth it is three years:
Be joyful, here comes he, our master, the father of thy babe."

"The father of my babe rode away upon a milk-white charger,
The cavalier I see approaching rides a stallion black as night."

"Lady, a man mounts one horse today and another tomorrow.
See, it is the very plume of thy Lord nodding above his brow."

"The brow of my Lord is broad and bright as the sunlight.
I see only a face dark with death and desire."

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"Lady, the old men are weary to hold their sons, the maidens
their lovers,
Already their hands are on the chains and cannot await thy
orders."

"Ho, Lady! lower the bridges; my men are impatient and
angry,
Know'st thou not how to welcome thy true Lord after three
years?"

"My true Lord had a ring which he wore upon his finger."

"Catch, Lady: here is the ring of thy true Lord Balnai."

"Now know I thou art a false knight. Help me, mother of
heaven!
My Lord's ring has lain on my heart since the day that he left
me."

"Ho, men-at-arms! See, the drawbridge is falling: now gather
together
After me, with one charge force the castle of the Lord Balnai."

"Oh, maidens, fly, while there is yet time, by the secret stairway,
Blood and blood will be spilt, and maids lost, ere the Castle
is taken."

The maidens fly, the old men lie spitted with lances,
Cries and clang of arms rise to the clouds in heaven.

"Now, my sweet babe, I charge thee, go forth, never resting,
Find thy father's corse, under stars' or sun's shine;
By mountain, by meadow, by forest or by the sea-shore,
Find thy father's corse and give it Christian burial!"

Then, my son, return, return never resting,
I charge thee pluck thy heritage from the false knight that slew
thy father!

Oh, Anna, take my babe, I cannot see, my tears are falling.
Hark, there is the step of that false knight coming to my bower.

Now give me the cup, old Anna: remember me at evenings.
As for me, I am going on a long journey."

The monotonous sad rhythm melted away, linking
itself with the dying sunlight. The young girl, Félice,

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her eyes streaming, lifted her face of a flower to Perroguet ; the evening light touched it with a pale film. The singer bent forward and kissed her cheek.

The charming action pleased everybody. The listeners sighed, stirred with a delicious melancholy. Secure in their happy and fertile fields, it was pleasant to drop a tear for a borrowed sorrow.

That was, in the summer or autumn. But if Perroguet dared to sing this song in winter or in any times of hardship, there would be such bitter outcries, such clenching of fists, such rage against the false knight that actually he had been obliged to compose a number of extra stanzas, in which the son, grown a man, discovers his father not dead but crazed and wandering, and returning, releases his mother, not dead, but a white prisoner. Yet this paid, too. The stream of coins that had flung themselves into his bonnet on the tide of furious indignation were equalled only by the offerings evoked by gratitude and relief.

But now the audience had grown a shade too pensive. Perroguet tossed his voice a few tones higher : a shower of gay notes scattered from his instrument ; at once there rose the old, familiar words :

*Be me play lo douz temps de pascor,
Que fai fuethas a floraz venir :
Et play mi quant aug la vaudor,
Dels auzels que fan retentir—*

(The beautiful Spring delights me well
When flowers and leaves are growing,
And it pleases my heart to hear the swell
Of the sweet birds' chorus flowing—)

Now they were all dancing again. The pipe-player had joined in the music. But the white handkerchiefs of the peasant women began to show steely-blue under the darkening sky : the glossy shoulder-curls of the men gave a rich blackness only below their hyacinth bonnets. They drew closer around them their hooded scarlet cloaks.

Andrea began to pack up. He had done very well : instead of a bulky pressure on his hump back, he had

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instead quite a compact weight in the wallet under his belt. Over the heads of the crowd he cocked his eye at Perroguet.

The singer was rather out of breath. "One more!" shouted the rapacious many-headed. "Before it becomes too dark."—Really, it was impossible for Perroguet to sing any further. He had had a long march since dawn to reach the village. But you must never disappoint an audience.

He put down his guitar and bowed five or six times. "*Too dark*," he said, "holá! holá!" The crowd closed round him. "A blind man," said Perroguet in his ordinary speaking voice which, excellently produced, fatigued him little, "was walking one night in the black dark, carrying a lantern. 'Oh, fool,' cried a company of friends meeting him thus, 'how can you, being blind, see in the dark even with a lantern?'—'Fool yourself,' said the blind man, 'I carry a lantern in the dark so that fools may not run into me.' *In the dark all men are blind.*'"

This was considered extremely good. "Ha ha ha, seest thou? The dark! ha ha, the blind! ha ha, the fool!" Hands as broad as hams clapped thighs, walloped neighbours' backs, heads wagged, sides split. The priest held his paunch as he laughed: this was a tale to his taste.

Some, of course, did not see any joke. There are always such. The children, for instance, found it quite stupid. They were tired and had begun to quarrel.

Well, well, even the pleasantest days must close. Slowly, by families, groups detached themselves. Still upheld by the gassy feeling that comes after laughter, with pleasant fancies diverting them, simmering so near the surface that a mere stumble over a stone seemed an exquisite pleasantry calling for mirth, the mothers and fathers arm-in-arm, the grandfathers led by the younger sons, they began the journey back to their homes in the village. "Good night, Father."—"God keep you, my children. Farewell, minstrel. Your memory is remarkable."

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"*Aie!* So it is! I have a fine memory, yes."

Father Dolin looked back. In a moment, as it seemed, the hollow was deserted and silent. The statue of St. Thomas-Nicholas was quite invisible now, lost in the same colour as the hill: only the flowers at its base still glimmered, lifting mutely their pale faces, suspended on the air. He sighed. How soon the shadows fall. How quickly the mist rises from the river.

II

Andrea Luquez and Perroguet stumped along briskly. It was their intention to pass through the outskirts to the farther side of the village, where an excellent shelter was afforded by a conjunction of pine and walnut trees overhanging a patch of fine grass. Towards this goal they tramped in the changing light.

The moon was rising, a huge golden dollar in a dark sea-green bowl. A glow surrounded her, drawn as it were from all the colours of the earth, as she rose. Quite soon it dropped away, she was left high aloft, stark-naked and pure. At once the whole darkness of heaven was turned into a space of infinite height: the whiteness falling from the moon seemed no longer to belong to her but to be a part of the intricate pattern of the earth. The chestnut and walnut trees grouped themselves blackly, the fields of flax, rye and saffron spread like a grey film; and between them ran the brilliantly-white ribbon of the road, with the two moving figures upon it. Grotesquely deformed, their shadows swung along beside them. Andrea's pack and Perroguet's bundle and guitar each lent a suggestive addition to the outline. . . .

"The devil on our shoulders, hey?" grinned Andrea. His impudent snub nose twitched mischievously.

Perroguet cast a very fearful glance behind him. On either side the dark wall of trees crept up to the very edge of the road. A man could put out his arm and half of it at once would be in shadow—hidden, gone. Perhaps a cold hand would come out of the wood and grasp it. Perhaps a thin face, shaking from side to side,

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with pointed teeth like a cat's, would appear half-way up a tree, accompanied by the sound of bells, and the knocking of one's own heart beating in terror. Perhaps a goat's head with horns and a leering smile—after seeing that a man would not be sane any more. . . . Really it was not at all pleasant to hear the hunchback speak familiarly of the devil.

Andrea watched his companion's face attentively. "You see, we are alone," he said. "Nobody near us for leagues. Beyond that wood is the cemetery. Old Marie who was killed by her husband lies there, and at the cross-roads, by the pile of stones, is where they hanged him. Yes; he here, she there. No doubt the devil goes between them. Six legs, they say, he has—between him, the man and his wife. A pretty sight, hey? A night of full moon, like this, he would show well, eh? a night when none else are abroad—"

In spite of himself, Perroguet began to tremble. He looked back once more on the silent, moon-washed, motionless fields. The road stretched empty and gleaming to the very edge of the horizon. At that moment, behind him, in the darkness at the edge of the wood, something moved. A tall, villainous shape, and a scuffling shadow beside it.

Perroguet shrieked.

"*Six legs!* Holy angels, I can see them! Six legs, all moving!" He stood transfixed, sweating in terror under the moonlight: all the phenomena of his legend-soaked mind whirling within him.

Sebastian and Suki, the bear, came into view. Andrea stopped. He let his pack down on to the road and sat on it. And he laughed. He clapped his knees and he shouted with laughter, and he rubbed his forehead where the strap of the band made creases. Perroguet looked a little sulky. All the same he was immensely relieved.

The pair caught them up. Sebastian walked stubbornly and pulled on the bear's rope. Every two or three steps she gave a little snuffling grunt and stopped to scratch the road with the long nails of her forepaw.

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"She is tired, the beast," said Sebastian bitterly.
All four of them were tired.

"At least, we have not much farther to go," said Andrea. He had shouldered his pack again, and taken up his stick. "The night is clear, a fire will burn brightly, and soon we shall have a fine supper, you will see."

"Ah, for you!" said Sebastian. "You sing, you sell toys, you have a fine supper. How easy. But I—I have two mouths to feed. And one a great black one like a big, big hole. . . ." He stared at Suki without sympathy.

Along the moonlit road the four went, ranging from high to low—Perroquet, Andrea, Sebastian, and Suki, the bear.

"We got her and her dam when my father was hunting one day near our home in the Pyrenees. Suddenly before him rose a big black moving mountain. Terrified, he let off his piece. The bear gave a loud cry and rushed to attack him. As big as a church the bear seemed to be, my father said. Her eyes flashed like lamps; her immense fangs, dripping with venom, stuck forth ferociously to devour him; all her claws were extended to an incredible length to tear him to pieces! . . . With his bare hands my father threw her right over the precipice." Sebastian paused. "Two thousand feet the bear fell: and my father stood and wiped the dust of her coat from his fingers."

Perroquet was a good deal impressed. Unfortunately, at that moment he encountered Andrea's expression. "And the little one?" enquired Andrea with delight.

"The little one," said Sebastian stiffly, not liking Andrea's tone, "was brought up soberly at home on bread and milk."

There was a small pause. Andrea was almost licking his lips with pleasure: but Perroquet threw continual disquieted glances at the slouching four-foot.

"My father," continued Sebastian impassively, "when he grew old, divided everything among his sons. My eldest brother had his hunting knives, and ropes, and the

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little cart : my second brother had his clothes, his boots, two pieces of silver, and his black hat ; and I, all I had, my friends, was this bear. You see, my father during his last illness had been occupied in teaching her to dance and to do tricks. Both my brothers thought I had the fortune."

At the magic word *fortune* the bear's shapeless bulk, patiently plodding along, was suddenly invested with an immense interest. . . . They all stopped in the road and looked at her.

" But does she realise that ? Chaff-witted she is, the beast. When we are alone I say '*Dance, Suki !*' She does her steps. She goes from one side to the other and at the same time she pats her paws together. It is a good dance. For a bear. Then I say the next. '*Hola,*' I say. '*Ready to mount. Mount !*' I pretend to bestride her. She takes my weight very nicely, sometimes even going a step forward alone. This is fine, I think. Now the children of Millebranches will be well amused. Now poor Sebastian will be richly rewarded. So. We arrive in the village, the children gather. Does she understand she is there to amuse them ? No ; she imagines, the imbecile, that they have collected to divert *her* ! Will she do her tricks ? Not one. No, all she will do is to sit up and smile, as if expecting something. '*Here I am, dears, now amuse me.*' The children are interested at first in her black face and her fur, which smells of mice, that is very curious : then they are bored. As for me, I am appalled, distraught, raving. Neither blows nor curses will move the black heart of Suki to reason. She is composed entirely of wickedness ! At last I explain to the people that today she cannot dance because she is so consumed with desire to show her latest prowess, knowing, as she does, that no other bear in France can mount children so happily and without danger. '*To ride on a bear ?*' all the children cry, longing yet frightened. '*Si, si, nothing Suki likes better,*' I promise, '*than a bold little cavalier on her back !*' At last one brave fellow volunteers. I assist to lift him. But does

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Suki stand up? She sits down at once on her tail. Of course the little boy slides off. He is disappointed and goes away weeping. And all she can do, the quadruped, is to sit there and look around, and smile with pleasure.
‘Well, here I am, children: amuse me! ’’

He glared with disfavour at the bear that would not stand up for the little children of Millebranches.

“And when we are leaving a fair at a village and have taken hardly a sou, is she ashamed? Is she contrite, broken-hearted? Why, at these times, when trotting out of the hamlet, I have actually seen her laughing! ”

Sebastian turned to the meek, round form beside him.

“When wilt thou learn,” he said disgustedly, “that life is real and earnest, and full of toil and seriousness? ”

It was clear to both his hearers that Sebastian had been much tried: and Andrea made sympathetic observations as to the lack of moral stamina in wild beasts, and the regrettable levity of young bears. As soon as he had said this Sebastian found himself ready to offer to help the hunchback with his pack.

They had, however, now arrived at their chosen camp. A sound of running water lapped the darkness enjoyably. The fine turf spread, soft yet firm, to the edge of the wood, where a certain snappiness underfoot and the smell of rosemary promised enough fuel for a cheering blaze.

Andrea, man of property, had had the foresight to purchase wine, eggs, onions and oil. Perroguet had been given by the mother of Félice a basket of mulberries and a young turkey. Sebastian had nothing but some black bread and sardines. All of them carried a twist of chocolate tucked into the belt.

And here Perroguet triumphed. For he was not only a musician but a cook of talent and experience. Daily he cooked for himself, buying his materials and carrying them with him. Instinctively he understood their needs. Meat he would place between two hot stones: butter he laid to cool in a running brook: bread he kept moist between dock-leaves. He seemed to comprehend the innermost qualities of bread, wine, eggs: as if it were

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an intuitive sympathy between his matter and their matter. They gave up their souls to him, and in return he glorified them, canonised them, bestowed upon them a rare and spiritual essence. So light, so perfect ! He cooked without fuss, without grease or disorder : he ate quickly and thankfully, from the happiness in his heart, looking up at the blue sky or the stars. The fragrance of his cooking mounted like a graceful wraith to mingle with the elements : the tints of sunset or dawn. It was the pure and unstudied offspring of his genius.

Tonight his task was simple. First two forked sticks, upright each side of the fire, a stout string drawn between them, and the turkey tied in the midst. And at just the right distance. For this is always the problem. Too far, and the meat is not cooked : too near and the string is burnt through. Ploff ! the bird falls in the fire. Charred flesh, that breaks into dry splinters under your teeth, and gritty with ash, is not very pleasant eating for hungry people. Better to wait till the first enthusiasm of the fire, the gusty smoke-breaths, have died away, leaving the quiet red heart throwing out its intense heat. Then the fire can be raked from the centre, a large stone put in the hollow, and on the stone a tin saucer. The heat of the fire is drawn inwards by the cold centre : it mounts steadily, roasting the bird that swings and sways in the draught of the flame, its fat dropping neatly into the vessel below. When it is done, how simply it is removed. The saucer, of course, is more difficult. A pathway must be raked to the centre stone and your hands must be wrapped in leaves to take away the boiling fat in the tin.

Perroquet accomplished all these manoeuvres with skill and speed. As soon as he took the bird off the fire he poured over it an egg, beaten in oil. At this a sharp hissing sound, accompanied by a delicate aroma, spread upon the air, rolling among the low branches of the walnut.

The flesh of the young turkey was absolutely delicious. Under its crisply browned skin it was flaky white, with

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an enchanting tenderness, in which the spice of the rosemary seemed to mingle. At first it was too hot to eat, steam rushed out of it as it was severed. Then it lay, warm as a dream.

The grease dripped from their mouths as they sat eating with their fingers, in complete contentment. The black bread soaked up the dribbles on lips and chin. It was rugged and mealy : how good it tasted against the smooth fatness of the young bird ! The wine, too, which passed from mouth to mouth, how coolly, how gratefully it washed the tired and dusty throats : its taste was sharp, like a March wind. The bones of the bird began to show now. They lay like little icicles in the moonlight, beside the fire. Sebastian attacked them with his strong young teeth. He drew the sardines from his pouch : how lucky, there were three. A mouthful, no more ; still, a pleasant one. At last there was only the basket of mulberries. Crimson-black their lushness nestled, piled in the small square : ripe, perfect. "The mother of Félice has done well : you may embrace herself, from me, next time, mon vieux ! "

Aho, that was a feast. After a long, exhausting day, what is better than to have a jingling pocket, a filled stomach, and, stretching your legs, to look up at the stars ?

Andrea carried both snuff and tobacco. Perroquet was offered a share of the latter ; Sebastian, of course, could not expect it. He took his snuff, and rose to attend to his bear.

Suki had been tied to a tree and had been amusing herself, or at least relieving her boredom, by a monotonous snuffing song to which she was much addicted. She had also scraped all the bark off the tree in a pretended search for insects ; now there was quite a heap of débris before her, which she was turning over and over with her nose.

"Oh, imbecile !" cried Sebastian with a sort of resigned despair. "Will *nothing* teach thee ? Now, if the tree dies, who will tell the bonhomme that it was the work of an unteachable bear and not of careless rogues in search

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of fuel? In any case, slugs and beetles do not stay at home at night. They are out, foraging for themselves, sensible creatures! Look for them in the daytime, brainless one, and thou wilt easily find them, sheltering under stones from the sun. *Catch!* But no, in the day-time you prefer to sleep. If it weren't for your master you would certainly starve. *Catch!* But I warn you, the very next time you won't dance, the very next time you sit down and smile, I will turn you out—*catch!*—right into the wood, and there you can fend for yourself or you can starve to death, my ill-found fortune, for all *I* shall care—*catch!*—and perhaps that will teach you to mend your brains and think of your master. Here, take the crust and all. I suppose you want the lot!"

The black bread was all gone. Suki held the last crust between her paws, gnawing it alternately all down one side of the jaw and then the other. Her dark outline was only just visible under the trees.

"The *order* is wrong," Andrea was saying when he returned, "it isn't according to science. Who would send a light, quick carriage galloping along a narrow defile ten minutes after a heavily-laden coach? What would be the result? Collision! Explosion! Lives lost! Wrong method altogether. Yet, my friend, what do we do? Ten minutes after we've taken in a heavy load of meat we send careering along the same tunnel a rapid consignment of fruits, sweets, what-not. Collision, of course! Explosion, of course! Lives lost, who knows? Yes, a great mistake we make there. With all our new discoveries we ought to know better."

Andrea was, to be sure, a little dyspeptic: perhaps his hump and the weights he carried, contributed. However, he looked, at the moment, extremely well satisfied; whatever the order of his nourishment, it had not disagreed with him tonight at least. Far too sleepy, Perroguet could not, in any case, argue: the design of meals came to him like music, as a natural inspiration. He yawned enormously: this did not check the talkative pedlar.

"Now, if *I* had my way—"

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He was interrupted at this moment by a loud and undisguised snore, proceeding from Suki. Perroguet grinned in the darkness. Undoubtedly, there was something comical about that animal. . . . The darkness swayed down upon him.

C H A P T E R I I

I

THE very first thing Perroguet heard in the morning was the rushing noise of the stream. And the second thing he heard was the notes of a bird on a walnut tree on the edge of the wood.

These twin voices mingled in a song whose meaning he could not understand. Awaking gradually from sleep, he lay listening to these sounds, at first mistily, and then with the whole attention of his being, trying to comprehend their music, or to capture it with the mind in some net of tones and changes that a man might play upon a flute. The notes of the bird sprang high and passionless above the sensuous bubble-ripple of the water : between them the ear was fulfilled, the essential harmony completed between the things of the earth and the spirit. But the words of the song he could not translate : save that it bore a message of time never resting, trilling, turning over, rippling forwards. . . .

"To put your head in a cold running stream and to open your eyes under the water—that takes all the sleepiness out of them," announced Perroguet, coming up the bank and shaking the wet from his ears and his mane.

"Take a look through your song-book," said Sebastian saucily, "and give us a morning lyric."

Naturally, Perroguet was furious. "When have you ever seen me look at a song-book?" he cried, stamping with anger. "Is not the stupendous memory of Perroguet renowned throughout Spain, Portugal, France? Is it not known everywhere he carries his music in his heart? Possessing an imbecile bear does not entitle one to insult

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the descendant of Troubadours.—Let me tell you——
(burr, burr!).”

Andrea hurried to the rescue. Not even he dared make fun of Perroguet on this point. He drew attention to the eggs that were boiling. Muttering and frowning, Perroguet made a concoction of chocolate mixed with the remainder of the wine. This proved very refreshing: thus is good temper restored.

They took the road again. The sun was brilliant, the air balmy. At the cross-roads they were obliged to part with Sebastian and Suki, who were travelling to Quatre Fleurs. The bear bounced along joyously, she was evidently looking forward to making the acquaintance of the village.

The pedlar and the minstrel proceeded together: and very pleasantly they conversed.

“ We are lucky, my friend, to live in the beneficent shadow of this century. Yesterday’s festival—what peace, what pleasure! A few centuries ago, what barbarians were abroad? No happy gathering of peasants could then have danced, safe from the Normans or the Moors. Then it was wars, wars, all the time. The knights of the South of France fought even in the quarrels of others. Yes, in my own country they battled under the Spanish Cid: conquering Toledo in the wars of Alfonso of Castille. Besides this, there were ever the Arabs and the Moors. Waving their blades, cutting off heads at one blow, crying on Allah, rushing about on their little fierce white horses. But as for poor Provence, she was no more fitted to withstand a war than a lily a hurricane, yes, she suffered greatly. No wonder all the old families were ruined, many of them wiped out altogether, the Counts of Toulouse——”

“ May I ask, after all, what they were fighting for? ”

“ Certainly you may ask. It shows much simplicity and great stupidity to do so, but that does not surprise me in you. Adventure. Chivalry, my friend. Many bloody deeds have a gay cloak. Yet, never mind—it spread ideas, it spread the Langue d’Oc, it brought wealth

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from the Coast. And wealth—ah ! Wealth brings a sort of softness, a grace, a—except of course among those fat Frankfurt merchants ! Yes, a hard life they give me, the close-fisted, big-bellied stay-at-homes."

His lip curled in a snarl of contempt. Perroguet looked at his friend with deep respect. A great store of knowledge was amassed in Andrea somewhere—perhaps in his hump ? wondered Perroguet, a little confused ; for his *pack* certainly must hold some of the books from which he drew his learning. Of course, he wasn't always easily understood, but his talk shortened the journey and gave it a flavour of all the worlds. And he spoke with supreme conviction, whether it was of ancient kings,—simply, with small details, as if he had been their friend, or whether it was of ancient animals that had lived on the earth beside man, and from whom he had run often, he and his tribe.

For Andrea was one of those people of whom one can say without hesitation that they have lived in the world before. His knowledge of the past was such that it seemed impossible he could have learned it. Sometimes, to Perroguet's distress, he departed on long mental excursions : spending a whole day recalling the heat, the flat bareness, the dusty wind in the stubble, the very colour of the grains of sand, or the hot, flaccid smell of the green mud squelching round your Jewish toes, and above all, the intolerable spiritual burden, as you laboured day after day under the lash of the Egyptian during the captivity of Israel. With the bitterness of a conquered race he described the dominance of your pain over your body and spirit ; so that you hardened to resist the pain ; until at last you could feel almost nothing, no emotion, no pleasure, no pain, any more ; except when sometimes your spirit burst through this merciful crust, and cried aloud to the God that had forgotten you.

" What ! " cried Perroguet, aghast. " You tell me you lived there, you knew these people, both the Normandy kings, and the Moors, and the Jews, and the men who lived in caves ? "

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"Not myself, no. Not exactly myself. But something that could see, and hear, and remember. I think," said Andrea,—he shifted his pack and spoke slowly and with reverence,—"I think I was a rat."

Instinctively Perroguet altered his position.

"You see?" said Andrea. "It is exactly that. When you see a rat, you say, 'Ah, the cochon, ah, the louse'; at once you seize a stick or a stone to murder it. With me it is different. I love rats. They are like Jews, for ever persecuted, yet indestructible. I feel for them humanity and respect. The rat looks at me with his sharp eyes filled with understanding. I take off my hat as to a friend. Welcome, comrade, fill your little stomach! You, too, are a viveur. You have travelled, you have thought, you know things. You go to sea, you go over the whole world in big ships—Ah, my friend, you see life! Kitchens, palaces, dungeons, battlefields. Bon Dieu, the hearts eaten by rats on battlefields! The hearts that held the last innermost thoughts of the dying. Friend and foe: they alone know the secrets of both sides. This gives them their great vitality and their spiritual power. Even in palaces—who knows?—only the rats behind the panelling. They hear all the state secrets, they know, *they* know all the complicated plots. Through the bed-curtains they hear the whispered vows of fidelity—ah, ha ha, whom are they addressed to *this* time?—They see, they hear, they remember, but they don't interfere. It doesn't concern them. It is as if life laid this knowledge as an involuntary offering at their feet. They accept it with the proud, complaisant indifference of conquerors. Yes," said Andrea, "I think I was a rat."

This sort of talk saddened Perroguet considerably. It made him feel his limitations. For himself he was and had ever been only a man, no more. To console himself he would draw out his flute and blow a soft, gay air. At once his mind would be filled with colours and glancing lights; the trees would shine with a more brilliant enamel against the sky of inlaid gold; the far outline of the hills

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would deepen into purple on purple ; their shadows, laid across the flats, tremble in infinite blue.

Ah, if one could live on lights, shadows, tones of music.

II

Already the evening was drawing chill, the sky soon would fade : and still the road stretched before them, hard and unhelpful, with the nearest town a good many leagues away.

The sharp intrusion of necessity split into their thoughts. Without warning Andrea broke off, looking at the sunset. " Certainly, sleeping in the open is fit only for summer months. A good mattress, filled with plenty of straw, and a charcoal brazier, are better friends for a man than a coloured sky."

But are they ? Perroguet wondered, his mind torn as ever between respectful agreement with his learned friend and an instinctive denial.

At that moment, a noise of horses' hoofs, of rapid wheels, of creakings, of crackings of whips, was wafted towards them. A coach, carrying the mail, with twenty dragoons trotting in front, rounded the top of the hill and broadened into the hollow, where the whole cavalcade drew up. Perroguet watched them with interest. The men dismounted to ease their horses, allowing each a mouthful of water from the roadside stream. The horses were covered with dust, like the wheels of the coach and the backs of the postilions ; they stood still, their necks stiffly stretched, drawing the water into their bellies. Too soon they were pulled away, and the girths tightened again ; while the escort, who had been straggling all over the road, stretching their legs, exchanging a joke or two, made ready to remount.

Perroguet turned his concern to the occupants of the coach. Some persons of quality, a merchant or two, perhaps a banker. It was not entirely filled.

The same thought seemed to have struck Andrea. He looked at the coach, and something else occurred to him too. Making his hump more observable than ever,

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dragging his pack with difficulty, he approached the guard.

"Heigh-ho, friend, it's a long way when night's coming on, and you have to go uphill, carrying a load."

The guard slapped his thigh, stamping on the ground to relieve his muscles from inaction. "Very likely," he observed with indifference.

Andrea drew nearer.

"How much is the fare from here to Lyons?"

The guard stared contemptuously. "More than you've got," he said, exercising his arms.

From his pocket Andrea drew forth a small measure, in silver, finely chased, such as, in rich houses, salt is kept in. "This cost me in Frankfurt twenty thaler. At least, let us say it cost me that. I got it from a little merchant called Josephshausen. I cannot say, of course, how he happened to have it."

The guard took a quick glance up and down the road.

"Get in, get in," he said. "In any case you must pay for your journey."

"My friend too, of course," said Andrea.

Perroquet, who had been looking on astounded, smiled charmingly.

"It will be strange," he said, taking off his hat in his professional manner, "if I cannot raise enough money while in the coach to pay for my journey."

The guard looked scandalised. Andrea rapidly intervened. "My friend is simple," he said, touching his head significantly. "He is a musician, he does not understand the ways of the world."

For some extraordinary reason the guard seemed both pleased and relieved to hear this. It also appeared to him a compliment for himself. The soldiers had all mounted again by now and were preparing to move off. "Excuse me, gentlemen," said the guard, opening the door at the back of the coach, "here are two travellers who are obliged to accompany us for a short distance.—Throw your bundle in the corner, there, out of the gentlemen's way," he said in a swift undertone to Andrea. He

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turned to Perroquet fiercely. "And not one sound from you!"

The whip cracked, the coach hung a second, then lurched forward with a great jolt. Perroquet stretched out his legs. Suddenly he discovered how tired he was.

Nothing is pleasanter when you are tired than to sit knowing the miles are slipping by you without your effort, hearing the creak and rattle of harness, feeling only the swing and jolt of the journey as regular as a rocking-horse, and seeing in the semi-darkness the faces of strangers who are at the same time near you and sharing your adventures. Perroquet sank, sank in his seat with each movement of the carriage: his thoughts flowed in a happy, soft, melodious rhythm: his eyes closed.

Diable! yelled Perroquet, sitting up, rubbing his shins. His startled gaze beheld, opposite him, a very angry old gentleman, in a rich brown velvet travelling-suit. His eyes, very small and bright, were trembling with fury, and his thin nostrils worked in and out. The little cutting-whip which had delivered the blow was still quivering like an enraged adder.

Perroquet stared. The pain itself was sharp, but the unprovoked assault hurt his mind. A little sigh made him turn. On the left of the old gentleman was a very young lady. She was dressed soberly, as befits a wife. Her attitude was one of extreme decorum. Yet her face beneath the veil was roguish and filled with amusement. Directed by her glance he looked down. Upon the voluminous black folds of her skirt there showed quite plainly a dusty imprint from his own shoes, his dirty, old, travel-stained shoes, which were still only a few inches away.

Perroquet sprang back in horror and contrition. He laid one hand on his heart, and pulling off his hat with the other, prepared to produce a superlatively magnificent bow. "Madame," he began tumultuously—

Andrea gave him a blow in the ribs.

His breath choked, his arm checked in mid-action.

Instantly the lady produced a fan and held it before

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her face. It was a large black one, and hid her to the hair. A little quivering of the hand, a little shimmering motion among her draperies, was all that showed of her helpless, unconquerable laughter. Perroquet's confusion was extreme : but it had no remedy. "Condesa!" said the Spanish gentleman sharply, transferring to her his gimlet stare. He added something haughtily ; to which she replied in a lively tone.

Indeed, before the night was over, the extreme liveliness of this young lady was apparent to all. She was hardly still for a moment. Either her bag was lost or her feet were cold, or she wanted snuff. Speaking sometimes in Spanish, sometimes in French, she accompanied all her words with small intense movements and an illuminating variety of tone.

On the hard road, under the moonlight, she complained they were going too slow. When they came to patches of darkness she complained of their speed. "How can they see? They will stumble."

At last she really began to feel nervous. It was the last part of their journey through the deep woods of Malpont that had the evil reputation. The moon had set. The darkness was perfectly quiet. The coach broke up the silence and darkness like a schoolboy whistling to keep up his courage. Nothing could be seen outside the coach windows ; only the branches of trees scraped suddenly on the roof or against the wheels like a hand laid upon them. . . .

Each time this happened the young Countess jumped a little, and shivered, and pressed her vinaigrette to her lips. "Madre de Dios!" she murmured. "Do you not think, my love, that we are in great danger from robbers? You know your sister Lucia lost all her jewels in the forest of Chênet on a night no darker than this. The Lisbon coach had all their throats cut, too; my father has often passed the cairn. Do you not think you had better look out the pistols, so that you can at least make a resistance? Misericordia, I am terribly frightened . . ." she said, clinging to the arm of her husband.

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Everyone could see he was exasperated by this behaviour. It was impossible, in public, to rebuke her too sharply. It was sufficiently infuriating to have had one's own coach incapacitated, to be forced to travel ignobly even for a short distance, in a public conveyance, without having one's wife draw attention to herself. . . .

Besides, she had voiced the thoughts of every person in the carriage. How gladly would they have brought out and got ready their weapons if they had thought of it for themselves ; but how humbling to be seen to act on the suggestions of a female—overheard, only, at that. How thankfully they saw now a little patch here and there of sky appearing behind the darkness of the forest.

As if they, too, felt relieved at coming at last out of danger, the horses of the escort gathered themselves up and sprang onwards strongly, to clear the last sentinels of trees and the steep escarpment that bordered the highway.

At that moment, even in the act of that springing thrust, they all pitched over forwards on to their noses. In one instant the whole of the first rank were rolling on the ground, kicking and squealing, half of them already entangled with each other and with the rope that had been stretched across the road. The soldiers fell heavily, cursing and shouting in shock and surprise. The later ranks, unable to pull up, came down too. The coach horses, with the coach running heavily forward against their heels, were pushed before they could stop, and fell on their knees.

Into this mass of struggling limbs, confusion and darkness, suddenly a shot split. Its sharp staccato report shook the whole air. Confusion tenfold increased. The soldiers, trying to free themselves from their struggling horses, trying to find in the darkness their fallen weapons, were unable even to defend themselves against the invisible enemy. And crack ! crack ! crack ! came in increasing violence from the roadside.

Two or three men were hit. All at once the dragoons stamped, falling over their horses, and crashing their way back into the wood. Here they would have shelter,

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at least. Their officer, a young boy in his first command, fell with a wound in his thigh : on hands and knees he crawled between the horses and reached the ditch, where he fainted. At this moment the coach horses reared to their feet and galloped away wildly, the coach lurching and rattling noisily behind them.

At the first check the coach door had been flung open, and Perroguet, being nearest to it, shot out. No one was left in the road now but he, the guard, and the coachman. Another shot cracked. "Mille tonnerre !" shrieked the guard, clapping a hand to his shoulder and falling against his companion. They both stumbled away as rapidly as possible.

Perroguet fled too. He made for the nearest tree-trunk ; from behind which he listened. The confusion was followed by a complete stillness. The soldiers had gone, their horses had scattered, the coach was farther on up the road. Curiosity overcame him. From trunk to trunk he made his way towards the coach, keeping within cover. In any case, he was not at all afraid of a wood that held no more than bandits. The trees dwindled, the road gleamed dimly white under the open sky. A wall about fourteen feet high met the road at the edge of the wood ; its outline began to show against the paling heavens : and suddenly with a freezing horror Perroguet perceived the steeple hats of immensely tall men appearing above it, with the small puffs of smoke from their weapons.

The coach was still standing in the road, the horses dripping with sweat and foam. A man leapt the wall easily and advanced towards the coach with two pistols cocked. Something in the nature of this leap gave Perroguet a shock. Instantly he struck off through the trees to the right, and jumping a small brook which the road bridged, he arrived by this manœuvre at the other side of the wall, which was rapidly becoming more visible in the strengthening daylight.

And here he paused with astonishment. For on this side the ground swept up in a curve, and the wall was no

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more than a few feet high. On the top of the wall, at intervals, hats had been carefully placed. A pistol lay beside one of them.

That was all. But it was enough. Perroguet snatched up the pistol, and with a shout he jumped the wall too.

"Hola, robber and deceiver! Here, turn! Give yourself up ere I blow your brains out! Would you cheat us all, Spanish grandee and people of taste and position, with a paltry trick as old as Methuselah? A worthless ruse, known to all travellers? A thing that wouldn't deceive a snail? Go on, call to your comrades! Fetch the rest of the gang! Surely they will come to your help?—Or no, stay!—For if you move, I'll kill you!"

The robber, who was in the process of forcing each passenger at the pistol's point to deliver his valuables and descend, turned at these shouted words, and presented his piece with an evil grimace at Perroguet. The lady, the last occupant of the coach, shrieked. At that sound the man turned and fled down the road: and in a moment was lost in the wood.

Perroguet threw away the pistol. It was empty, anyway.

He turned to the young lady. "I am happy, Señora," he said in his best professional manner, "to have been the humble instrument to serve you." Already he knew in his mind how he would make a song out of this adventure. He took off his bonnet and he laid his hand on his heart; he prepared to bow. This time he was not interrupted. His gesture was a graceful and sustained musical chord.

The young lady smiled deliciously. She had enjoyed the whole thing, shots and all. Carried away by the adventure, the early morning, and her own exuberance, she extended her hand to the handsome, dusty, charmingly unusual young man. Perroguet took it at once.

"Beso a Usted la mano, Señora." Bending, he raised it to his lips.

"Cavallero," she murmured, laughing. "Beso los pies de Usted! Vaya——"

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At that moment the Spanish gentleman came up. He was stamping with rage and spinning his cane like a whirlwind. At first he could hardly speak for fury.

"I'll have you arrested!" he screamed, with his first words. "How dare you touch the hand of the Countess? How dare you rob the mail-coach? I'll have you put in chains! An accomplice! A conspiracy! A——"

"On the contrary. Cannot the Senhor see I have assisted him?"

"I can only see you have jumped over the wall. I can see very clearly you came into the coach at nightfall in an exceedingly suspicious manner. I can see very clearly you are a villain of the most degraded type. Where is the pistol you were brandishing a moment ago at the Countess? Ah, you pretend you have not got it You cannot deceive me! You——"

"I am sorry the Senhor has been robbed, but it was not by me."

"Don't you dare to contradict me, bandit and cut-throat! If this were my own country, you would be thrown into a dungeon! If I were on my own land, I, Conde del Escoiquiz, you would be torn to pieces by my hounds! Ha ha, the Countess herself would throw you to them——"

The young lady flushed hotly and with anger; she tossed her head as if about to speak.

The Conde continued to scream. A little foam had gathered on his lips, a gleam of insanity glinted for a second in his eye. The colour faded from the face of the young lady. A dark shadow of hatred and rebellion slowly suffused it.

Perronet turned away. It was not his affair. The man had been robbed, true, but that was all.

The guard and the coachman at this moment came up, the former with his arm roughly bandaged. As if by magic all the rest of the travellers began to appear. The young wounded officer staggered from the ditch and was helped across the road. To everyone's surprise the fat merchant of Nantes crept out from beneath the coach, whither

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he had disappeared at the beginning of the fusillade. Only the extreme stress of fear could have caused him to fit into so small a space. His cheeks were still white and shaking like jelly, and his coat soiled with oil and mire from the wheels, but his purse was intact.

It was decided to proceed, in the hope of picking up the escort along the road. In any case, it was now daylight.

The Count was still shaking his fist, stamping and vociferating to anyone who would listen to him. His command of French had entirely run out. He gibbered each time he caught sight of Perroguet. "Vaya Usted con cien mil Demonios!" he roared, shaken with fury. The lady looked cold and sullen.

All things considered, Perroguet judged it wiser to part company with the coach at this juncture. In this view the guard had already, apparently, arrived. With a swift gesture he raked his uninjured arm under the seat and flung forth Perroguet's bundle. "Go, accursed vagabond!" he said savagely.

Perroguet picked up his bundle from the road. The coachman lifted his long whip. The coach rumbled off, grinding, shaking and swaying. How strange that they should all be shut in there together, in that smooth, painted box—the lively young lady and the insane nobleman, and the fat merchant from Nantes.

He turned, whistling lightly, and beheld the sun just topping the trees. The foliage and branches of their crests were eaten up by its radiance, its light encroached so far. A fiery circle surrounded the sun, and below that, what was left of the trees was visible. At the foot of them Andrea was sitting.

Beside him was his pack, which must have fallen out of the coach some time before. He greeted Perroguet cheerfully, raising his head from the counting of coins into his wallet. Perroguet stared in amazement, hardly able to believe his eyes, seeing the gold pieces.

"You see, I knocked him on the head from behind, with my staff," grinned Andrea, "as he came past the

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trees. He was running and not looking. So I was able to get back my money. Only my own, of course, mark you—that is, what I considered myself owed, when you consider loss of sleep, time and temper ; to say nothing of the fright. Yes, coins only. No watches or rings. It would never do for a pedlar to have stolen goods in his pack. No, no, one must keep on the right side of the authorities."

Perroguet gazed in awe and fear at his deformed friend. In a leisurely fashion, still sitting by the roadside, Andrea prepared to make breakfast.

"For instance," he continued, "how useful is that silver salt-casket. Half the guards on the mail-coaches deal in contraband goods as a side-line. Yes, yes, with all their opportunities it pays them well to dodge the gabelle. Josephshausen is their go-between. He's always worth mentioning. They see me, they know I travel, they guess I hear gossip, they cannot tell how much I know. And they cannot know how much I may tell. They are afraid to refuse me. Yes, indeed, I, too, have opportunities. Many a lift have I had that way.

"Now I shall sleep for half an hour. That rascal will not awaken before midday."

CHAPTER III

I

FROM town to town Perroquet and Andrea travelled together. The routes and the fêtes that called to the one invited the other also. Besides, they were friends, these two. You must have at least one friend in the world. It was pleasant to know, at fairs, that there would be someone to help in case of trouble, or be interested in your takings if all had gone well, or share his meal if you had done badly. It was pleasant to catch the eye of your friend above the backs of the sellers of paper flowers, of Rheims gingerbread, of knives that won't cut : to laugh in company at the vanity of the sweetmeat-maker who rolled the sweet paste in long white strips, rings, and spirals, around his wand, at the same time rolling his eyes at all the beauties in the crowd : and who indeed was only restrained by the delight of the children at his manual dexterity, and the sudden fierce appearances of his wife from the back of the tent, from going a good deal further. . . . It was pleasant to watch, for a few minutes, parading outside their canvas-theatre, the villain in his top-boots, the village maiden with a rose in her bosom, the romantic lover in his long fair curls, the king in his tinsel crown ; their appearance accompanied by drums, cymbals, and trumpets. How interesting to Andrea, amid the din, the lights and the noises, were the sellers of old books who attended regularly, and whose wares could be examined long after the last of the crowd had departed, gorged with potatoes and chocolate, and with paper flowers in their hats. At Versailles, in August, at the fair of St. Louis, where articles of devotion were sold, Andrea bought for himself a very rare and curious book : while the summer evening fair of Neuilly showed to

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Perroquet the fashionable world of Paris. Entranced, he beheld the modish throng that came to smash dolls with balls ; to gaze at the beautiful Circassians ; to watch the birds that tell fortunes ; and to consult the somnambulist. To each, the fair brought something beyond the mere earning of bread ; yet Perroquet was never satisfied. He became, instead, irritable and sensitive ; even critical of Andrea.

He would notice, for instance, when they were supping together afterwards, that Andrea had the disgusting habit of not swallowing his food until a mouthful of liquid had softened it. It sickened Perroquet to see him put a big hunk of bread into his mouth and then a load of wine or chocolate, and then swallow the mixture : opening his mouth almost before it was down to deliver some new harangue. Andrea, who considered that alone right that ministered to his ease or his outlook, outraged some sense in Perroquet, who thereupon found himself eating with exaggerated niceties. And this alone might have set up a quarrel between them, but for the open air, the large skies of night and morning, the kindness of roads.

Yet it was with pleasure and relief that he hailed Sebastian again, meeting him one summer's evening, on the road to St. Etienne. Sebastian, like everyone else, was going to the fête. He was looking stronger, and broader ; his cheek glowed, his eye shone, he felt that here, if ever, Suki would retrieve her honour.

And Perroquet felt excited too. The air of general merry-making was irresistible : besides, who knows what fortune may not lie in a Fair ?

So they stood, hailing each other, asking for news and telling it in the same breath : and even as they spoke the forerunners of the Circus passed, dressed in exaggerated uniforms of postilions, trotting very quickly on small piebald ponies, blowing trumpets, and carrying banners on which vivid and unnatural colours competed to sting the eye. An air of sharp mystery passed with them.

Drawn by the noise of their horns, by their sound of their urgent trotting, drawn also by some invisible chord,

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the country people swarmed across the fields, ran down the lanes, stood open-mouthed at the roadside and by the ditches lining the route : the townspeople, already in their best, flocked out from the city gates to meet the new-comers.

After the first riders had passed a band of musicians appeared, marching in step. Uniformed up to the chin, looped with gold and silver braid, which not only festooned their breasts in the most gallant profusion, but also decorated, with rosettes and circles, the outer sides of their thighs, which were thus caused to resemble the legs of frogs, they bore upon their heads the hats of French marshals of the army ; beneath these little was seen but their bristling moustaches and the ends of their noses sweating in the heat. A gay tune it was that they raised.

*I'd like to be a sailor on a bright blue sea,
I'd like to be a shepherd on a sun-kissed lea,
It's fine to be an Emperor, it's grand to be a King,
But best to be a Circus-boy, a-riding in the Ring !*

The musicians threw out the notes merrily, in little jerks, in time with their marching. A sense of suppressed excitement, a sense of jollity unmixed with care, began to diffuse itself on the burden of this melody whose words were known to everyone. The people on all sides took up the air. Boys began to march along beside the musicians, keeping in step, swinging their arms.

Minute by minute the crowd grew. Andrea gripped tighter his hold on his pack, planting his legs and his stick firmly to withstand the buffeting. But nobody was concerned about him. . . .

All eyes were looking back into the distance, where the long road topped the horizon. Behind it, in dark horizontal masses, the whole sky was banked with steel-grey clouds, their western faces flushed deep rose. Borne forwards against this stern yet majestic background, and full in the blaze of the setting sun, a procession moved. The rumble of its coming floated before it, the dust of its passage rolled behind. Smoothly, as if on air, inevitably, like an approaching fate, it advanced, without effort : its

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gradual enlargement seeming not caused by its own approach but by a growing intensity of emotion. Higher it rose, engulfing its huge canopy, each minute giving a new detail to the glowing mass, and to the million points of light that sparkled within it.

Against the sky came an immensely tall open coach drawn by two elephants. In the foreground of this structure, raised on a platform, and holding a dozen silver reins that led down and forwards to the elephants' bodies, stood a woman.

Her arms and shoulders were bare ; they gleamed in the sunlight, her hair tossed over them. Around her body her clothing flamed like a sheet of metal. Out-thrust by her unconquered pose, outlined against the passing sky, glittered the low breast-piece of golden scales : above it the deep moons of her bosom glowed in the level sun-rays. Below, a scarlet robe fell widely, tinging its folds by the heavens from orange to purple, and swaying with the coach's motion on vast, lazy airs. On her head a shallow golden casque flaunted a rich plume that swung upon her shoulder, mingling with her wild locks.

Something magnificent there was in her animal grease and dirtiness, in the savage glamour of her dark eyes, wide open and shining in their oily basins, in the thick hair springing out from her temples and curling blackly and with arrogance, and in her natural mouth, the colour of wine. Such unquenchable beauty scorned the puny comb and the small competitive vanities of art and cleanliness.

Without movement she passed on high, slowly : her arms before her, outstretched. On either side, aloft, their forelegs raised on drums, posed the two animals, the lion and the lamb. Like a white flower, plucked too full-blown, rose the lamb's curled and powdered head. The lion was a Nubian ; his thick black mane jagged the evening sky, and his eyes, the width of the desert between them, looked with a sad dignity into the immense face of the sun.

Motionless, these three figures passed. As if following the direction of her outstretched arms, the gaze of the

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Queen of Beauty and Love was lowered. It fixed itself without passion, without change, on a little scene before her.

Just preceding the elephants, and almost hidden by the crowd, was a small white pony led by a groom in black and scarlet. It bore a round platform, a hoop of white leather fringed with silk. Upon the hoop a little girl was dancing.

She was about eight or nine : her head bore a band of white roses, and her body a stiff gauze skirt powdered with silver : one toe supported her, the other stretched far behind like the legs of a swan in flight. She held this arabesque for as long as she could, that is, for a few seconds : when she was tired, quite candidly she changed her position. She did not strive to please the people : it was as if she said, 'I have been taught to do this and I am proud to do it : naturally it must be pleasant for you to watch me.' Her legs were thin, yet rounded, like the stalks of grass, and with the same enlargement at the knobs of the joints. There was no graciousness, no tapering, no curves. That was left to the woman high up behind, facing the sunset.

Perroquet stared from his heart at this tiny, serious figure, light as a spirit. A sudden and indescribable feeling thrilled him. It was wonder, it was love, it was pity. It was as if something he had always known, and yet never had known, stood for the first time before him, gripping his heart. It was a—what was it ? A tune ? Yes, a tune such as one hears in dreams, and waking, tries to hold, and finds is lost. . . . A tune born of starlight and freshness and the youngest things in the world. . . . A tune that floods the heart swiftly and at once, yet before it can be caught fades and vanishes away for ever.

A spasm of pain, for no reason at all, swept through Perroquet's mind ; he lurched against Sebastian, confused with his own feelings. The light silver dream passed on, dancing . . .

In the second cart, behind the coach and the elephants, four girls, in trailing green draperies, attended a gigantic

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water-turtle which swayed half in, and half out of, a large tub festooned with flowers. On its head was crammed a three-cornered hat and under its chin was stuck an argumentative and pointed white beard. This head, on the thin neck, protruding from the shell, and swinging from side to side, the mouth opening and shutting mechanically with the jolting of the cart, produced a striking resemblance to a well-known Member of the Chamber of Deputies haranguing the crowd. The people roared. Cabbages and onions were flung at the cart, some coppers, and a great many good-natured coarse jests.

From this spectacle Sebastian turned with loathing. "Wilt thou mark," he said bitterly, addressing the bear, "the behaviour of the animal that loves his master? The sublime aplomb, the savoir faire, the knowledge supreme to amuse the populace? You do not look, you heed nothing. Nevertheless, there is *one* argument," he raised his arm threateningly.

Suki grinned. Her expression appeared to receive his gesture as an act of homage—involuntary, almost embarrassing. "I know it, 'tis true, don't mention it, dear boy," her smile said.

Nonplussed as usual, Sebastian turned to Perroguet. But Perroguet did not hear. He was pushing through the crowd madly, driven by some feeling he could not understand, straining to glimpse again the white roses, the spangled skirt. But already the small figure was lost. It was blotted out by the heads of the multitude, swaying, pressing, jostling for places, by the elephant's bulk, by the high throne of womanhood, by the civic humour of the turtle, by the dust and draggled tail of the procession. . . .

Suddenly all the glamour of the Circus seemed tawdry, its music strained, its tinsel meaningless. Perroguet pushed and ran and shouted and shoved. Men in scarlet velvet and green leggings with long staves in their hands were beating back the crowd.

"Where is she? Which way did they go? Where do they perform?"

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"Stand back there, or you'll get hurt!"

"But, my friend, I only ask, I just wish to know——"

"I can't hear you. Keep back there, all of you! Make a lane, make a lane." Whack! the staff descended.

"The cages of the tigers are coming."

Perroquet fell back, immensely unhappy.

A woman in the crowd took pity on him. "They are going to the Pré du Concord," she said. "Didn't you know? It is at the other end of the town near the bridge. They give one performance; it is on Sunday."

II

It would be useless, of course, to try to find Andrea again, or Sebastian either, in that crowd. Perroquet pushed on towards the city. An immense feeling of exaltation and of wonder possessed him. He felt himself borne along on some emotional element fused from the throb of the crowd, the spectacle he had just seen, and the curious unknown longing in his own heart.

All the thoughts of his being now seemed focussed on a place in time no more than one day ahead: the rest seemed suspended in a happy abeyance.

Quickly, and as though on air, he passed through the gates of the city: they loomed high and threatening against the sky that had already lost its colour. He, who generally observed these things, never even looked up: eager, carried by the stream, he came to himself only on finding himself marooned in a little square.

The edge of the crowd had eddied into this, the Circus had passed on. They stood together, jammed, there was no outlet. Perroquet passed his hand over his brow; he felt as if he were taking breath again after a dream. The people looked anxiously around; they began to wonder how they had got there. Quite automatically Perroquet drew out his flute. He played, not the Circus Boy, but a sweet tune from the South. Then he played the Song of the Three Lovers. Then he gave them excerpts from Mozart—from Requiem and from Così Fan Tutti. He felt inspired. He played as never before. The audience

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listened spell-bound. In any case, they could not get away.

An important-looking man in livery pushed through the crowd to his side.

"On the part of Monsieur le Maire," he said, announcing himself. "His daughter is being wedded to-morrow." He opened his hand, showing a gold coin in the palm.

Perroguet's eyes shone. In the midst of all his strange feelings he could appreciate a compliment. To be invited by a mayor to play for a wedding, this was fame indeed, this was indeed recognition of talent! This is what happened when one came to a town, a city, where people had culture and understanding. Besides the gold louis.

"His daughter is beautiful: that will attract a crowd. The town is en fête; that will attract a crowd. The Mayor, just at present, fears crowds. You cannot tell their temper. He is—my friend, you understand, there have been some new taxations. My master has therefore sent me to bid you attend outside his house to-morrow, where you will play the same tune from nine in the morning until six. Any short one will do. A few people may come in the beginning but they will soon go away. No one will be able to stand it. And, of course, as for those who may throw refuse at you, the Mayor will be able to have them arrested."

All this was said in a pompous yet hurried undertone. In all his life Perroguet had never been so insulted, and so astonished. As if turned to stone he stared at the majestic envoy, who continued to whisper.

"You see, the Mayor's house is just opposite. That one with the green shutters. You can see for yourself. A crowd here, a—a hostile crowd, would not be easily got rid of. The Mayor prefers to have the wedding conducted in peace and with decorum. And, my friend, two more louis will await you in the evening."

That settled Perroguet. No one who is sane can despise three louis. At the same moment he saw the almost miraculous significance of this receipt of money just now. He gave one of his very best bows. "At the

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service of the Mayor," he said. Yes, and out of this he would be able to make a rhyme, what a rhyme, one day! . . .

The manservant withdrew. The crowd were trying to disperse. The bottle-neck held them and exasperated them. They raised their voices angrily, pushing from behind.

Perroguet understood only too clearly the Mayor's anxiety.

III

Himself, he felt pleased and interested. His momentary annoyance was forgotten. A curious day he would have of it, to-morrow! And in the evening enough wealth to buy the very best seat at the Circus. . . .

That tiny dancing figure swam before him; but tenuous still, ungraspable, glowing and then fading away. Yet he knew now for certain that if he could but see it again a melody, clear as silver, would spring into his mind. Or rather, would spring *out* of his mind, miraculously given birth: for surely it lay in his mind now, right at the core of it, only he could not touch it nor see it. . . .

In this confused and exalted mood he made his way to the inn, Auberge du Chêne Vert et de France. With money in his pocket he could afford the luxury of supper and a bed. There was M. Dodinet, the owner: there he was, just within his door as usual, broad-browed and beaming. Hailing Perroguet as an old friend, as indeed he was, asking him news of here and there, he passed him in to the tap-room, already crowded with patrons. They all looked up, the flushed sweaty faces, with pleasure and interest, at the queer-looking customer shown in by the host.

Perroguet felt the position. It pleased him. He called, rather loudly, for food and drink. The very handling of the gold coin in his pocket, the comfortable solidity of its edge, gave a new tone to his voice and an undeniable swagger to his bearing.

They all began to talk; establishing, by means of

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tentative assertion, as is the way in taverns since the beginning of time, the identity and the history of the new-comer. And Perroguet, with his head swimming, was nothing loath to indulge them. He told them of his travels, of his adventures, of strange things he had seen, of his musical successes. He could not resist mentioning that he had been hired by the Mayor to play, on the very next day, from nine till six.

"All those hours! You must indeed have a large repertoire! You had better hire me, in your turn, to carry your musical scores."

As soon as these words were spoken Perroguet felt he was in danger of becoming ridiculous. In defence, he began at once, as was natural, to boast still more. They all heard how he carried his songs in his heart, how his musical memory was renowned throughout three countries, how many great personages, having heard reports of his talent, had complimented him upon his superhuman powers. There was that time he had played before the Marquis de Barbidinier, and that time in the courtyard of the Duc de Tourailles. . . . The Conde Luis Ferreira. . . . But he was ashamed to tell them the terms on which he was to play upon the morrow.

Until quite late that night he remained, drinking and swaggering. All the same, early in the morning, he was up and alert and eager for the day's work.

By nine o'clock he had reached the Mayor's house. Hardly anybody was about. The house seemed silent and deserted behind the green shutters. No trace of the Mayor, or his family, or his majestic dependant, was to be seen.

Perroguet leant against the wall, and drawing out his flute, he began to play: his choice was the simple, but lively melody, the Little Rat of Dijon.

Clearly and quickly the notes flew off his flute into the air. His fingers, rapidly playing the stops, seemed to be dancing to the music. Trillingly the gay little tune shot against the hard stone faces of the buildings and the opposite wall: round and round it eddied in that small square: its finishing lines coming always with a little

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flourishing surprise : “ Ta-*pom-pom-pom*, Ta-*pom-pom-pom*, Le petit *rat* de Dijon ! ”

When he had finished the tune, he took a deep breath, and began once more.

It was amusing, at first, to see the rat going round and round, as it were, in his cage. It bore the face of Andrea and the sturdy brown body of Suki. The face of Andrea smiled, and the sturdy little body trotted along happily. Every now and then the rat stopped, sat up on his haunches, twiddled his whiskers, and then, with a little grunt, started off again—“ Ta-*pom-pom-pom*, Ta-*pom-pom-pom*, Le petit *rat* de Dijon ! ”

It was exhausting, nevertheless. When Perroguet’s breath had quite run down, he brought out his guitar. This seemed to give the rat new life. The tune sounded softer, mellower, the gaps where the flourishes had been were filled with a gentle echoing resonance. The rat was a brown wave, coming softly and swiftly out of the dark horizon, sweeping nearer and nearer, rolling over, ending with a clatter over the pebbles. Already, on the horizon, another wave is beginning to form, it comes along, exactly similar in shape to the first, it goes at the same pace, and takes the same time, it is spread and broken up in foam on the shore. . . . Already, on the horizon, another wave is heaping. . . .

A few people had collected in the square. They talked, whispered, laughed, nudging each other, casting interested and pleased glances at the house. They leant against the walls, their hands in their pockets, prepared to wait a bit, as one must. They formed their mouths to whistle with the tune the musician was playing.

The grim and perfectly blank faces of the houses looked down on them from all sides. The people began to stamp their feet and to shuffle. The interminable tune got right inside the cores of their teeth and set them jangling. The ceaseless reiteration entered their brains and made their hair almost rise from their scalps, as if in a gesture of spontaneous rejection.

“ Here, you ! ” shouted one rough fellow, seizing

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Perroquet by the collar. "What do you think we've come here for? Shut up your damned musical-box and clear! One more sound from it and I'll give you such a buffet that will knock both yourself and your teeth down your throat and stop your noisy career for ever!"

Perroquet discontinued his playing at once. He was glad, anyway, for a momentary rest. He took off his bonnet and bowed profoundly with a charming and intelligent smile. Ah, *now* I know what you want, he seemed to be saying. With a great air of gallantry he laid down his guitar, took up his flute, settled his mantle, threw himself into a pose of exaggerated musical abandon, and tuned up once again with the Little Rat of Dijon.

This was more than anyone could bear. There was an ugly rush across the street. Perroquet might easily have been very badly damaged. At that moment, above him, a window in the Mayor's house opened and the wigged head of a flunkey looked out. It was significant. It was enough. One could not commit an assault under the nose of the civic law. One could not, on the other hand, remain within hearing of that inexecrable repetition. . . .

"Deaf, or a lunatic!" exclaimed a woman from the other side, as the mob hung there in hesitation. It relieved their feelings. It gave, moreover, a good reason for their feelings, for the only feelings left them now—a violent urge to get away. Clamouring, they began to ebb from the square, scowling and spitting in disgust. Only a few were left standing about, looking bewildered. Suddenly one of them clapped his hands over his ears and ran out of the court as if the fiend pursued him. And so it did, too. Right out in the alley beyond the square he still heard it—"Ta-pom-pom-pom, Ta-pom-pom-pom, Le petit *rat* de Dijon!"

All day long Perroquet played that tune. Just after midday, the square being deserted, the bridal retinue set forth. With what interest Perroquet would have observed them, had his mind been free from the insistent rat. As it was he received a blur of feathers, laces, and satins, and

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faces flushed in nervous concentration. They did not even glance at the player by the wall. After an incredibly long time they returned. Friends accompanied them now. Ta-*pom-pom-pom*, Ta-*pom-pom-pom*. They all entered the house, the shutters were still closed. The silence of death descended. A very decorous gathering indeed was taking place within, upstairs, behind the shutters. Food, wine, fruit, flowers, formal compliments. The lovely bride. The honourable father, the deservedly-popular-and-dearly-beloved civic dignitary. The lucky, though unworthy bridegroom. The happy destiny foretold. More food, more wine. The bride's health.

Ta-*pom-pom-pom*! Ta-*pom-pom-pom*! Le petit *rat* de Dijon!

Perroguet had eaten nothing since the morning. His head was whirling from the incessant output of breath. He felt a drumming in his ears and a drowning sensation in his mind. He concentrated, with all the strength of his body, on the continual production of that rhythm. All sense of time passed from him. . . .

There had been no sound or movement in the square for a number of centuries. The bride and groom had long since departed. The shadows began to fall, slanting in sharp angles across the cobbles; distant bells from somewhere chimed and were silent; a blue mist began to hide the farthest houses. Across the soft face of the evening the senseless tune struck hysterically, like the ragged thrust of a sabre. Ta-h'm, h'm *pom*, ta-h'm, h'm *pom*, Le petit *rat* de Dijon!

Perroguet hardly felt the light tap on his shoulder. He sensed, rather than knew, a majestic being was giving him money. He could not utter thanks. He could do nothing but wait, wait, wait; his head and his arms dropped limply, letting the healing silence flow into his soul.

"Get on, now, go!" ordered the Being angrily, giving him a great slap on the back.

Perroguet reeled away. He felt completely light-

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headed. He swayed across the court like a drunken man, fetching up sharply, and bruising his shoulder, against the great stone that stuck out under the arch.

The sharp contact, and his own movements, began to bring about a realisation of his position. An enormous delight transported him. The day was over and he was rich, rich. And oh, my faith, he was thirsty. Such a thirst as never before any man could possibly have experienced. And he could quench it too! The gold burned in his pocket. Food, wine, flowers, the tiny white dancing figure of the Circus . . . the ecstasy of that fleeting melody that was to be caught safe and kept for ever. . . .

He almost fell over the threshold as he staggered into the crowded parlour of the Auberge du Chêne Vert et de France.

Already feeling himself a habitué (if not a hero, indeed), and flushed by the splendour of his wealth, he called loudly to Rostin, the servant. Only the best was for his use tonight ; bring it out, bring it out, the best wine, at no matter what the litre!

In a few moments his throat was moistened. Ah, what an unspeakable relief! Worth going through the Flames of Hell for, as Andrea used to say. But of course that was very irreligious. Never mind, Andrea was his friend, Andrea would be pleased to hear of his achievement. Everyone was his friend tonight . . . As his thirst was gradually slaked on the crimson stream, he discovered he wanted to talk. He must express *himself*, get rid, once for all, of the oppression of that crazy repetition. . . .

His flushed cheek, his excited eye, his loud conversation, attracted the attention of everybody, including that of a stranger who had been sitting in the inn for some time.

This young man, evidently of notable standing, had arrived at the inn on his way, apparently, to some important destination. He was wearing immensely tall boots with exaggerated high heels, a brilliantly flowered

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waistcoat, a long blue coat with enormous copper buttons, and a hat of a style incredible to the simple eyes of his beholders.

His manners and appearance caused them intense satisfaction. Undoubtedly he was a young gentleman of the great world. When tactfully approached, their host had murmured a high-sounding name unknown to any of them, and they had opened their eyes wider than ever in curiosity and gratitude.

He had been talking freely, the stranger, his long legs stuck out in front of him, his too white hand on the tankard. But when Perroguet had entered, and everyone had turned, greeting him, laughing, gesticulating, transferring their attention, a deadly, envious shade had darkened the young man's brow.

Immediately he had turned to the individual beside him, resuming his remarks in a high, thin voice. His French was so mincing that they could hardly follow it : Perroguet, however, even in his preoccupation, had at once recognised it as the language of Paris. Now, his words could scarcely make themselves heard. Many of those present had been visitors the night before : seeing Perroguet flushed, happy, talkative, they cried out to know about the marriage of the Mayor's daughter, the dancing, the presents, and the incredible achievement of the musician.

" What an insupportable time to pass ! Within those hours one could go through the larger part of all the composers ! Doubtless, for the Mayor, you gave careful selections from the classics. Nothing frivolous, naturally. Only airs from Grand Opera. I confess I had half a mind to go myself—with the crowd, you understand—when you told us of it, yesterday. But I'm glad I didn't. Those long Cantatas make my belly ache."

What with the wine he was drinking, what with his day's starvation and toil, what with his feeling of success, and the generous and admiring impulse in those surrounding him, Perroguet felt quite carried away. He still had enough sense to avoid the subject of the day's programme

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and found himself instead launching forth in a flood of other eloquence.

"Cantatas, indeed. Grand Opera, yes. I can tell you an interesting story concerning these things," he heard himself saying. "When I was six years old, my friends, I remember sitting in the pit at the Grand Opera at Marseilles to hear for the first time *Villanella Rapita*. My father had taken me, he was a great friend of music. The audience were quiet as mice. I can see them now, overwhelmed by the grandeur of the scene. In the middle of the principal aria my neighbour on the left suddenly leapt to his feet, and tearing his hair, stamping, shaking his fists, with a fury which terrified me, he shouted in a voice of thunder: '*Will you play D sharp, you wretches?*' Imagine it, my friends. The singer stopped, as if shot, in the middle of a phrase, the orchestra fell apart with a shudder of horror, the brass alone was left sounding in echo, while the audience, rising in a body, screamed aloud for the expulsion of the madman. Amid incredible uproar he was seized, my father and I were nearly suffocated, if not trampled to death, and amid all this, someone asked him his name. '*Mozart!*' Ah, my friends, what a stupendous silence. Then applause breaks out like a hurricane; Mozart, climbing over the seats, with his small body agile as a monkey, is soon installed in the orchestra. His face is flushed with his delicate health and his excitement. The opera is recommenced, Mozart conducting. Now is D sharp played in its proper place. At once everyone is amazed, transported—singers, orchestra, audience. The passage is raised to one of unearthly beauty. The opera flows on like a great river, to its close. Mozart is afterwards conducted in triumph to his hotel. I, as a child of six, I think I was sobbing. Mozart had sat beside me."

During this recital, which Perroguet had lubricated freely with libations, the stranger's displeasure had steadily mounted. He was now quite left out of the interest of the assembly. He ruffled his collar in an important manner and blew some snuff off his sleeve. He

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turned towards Perroquet, raking towards him his long legs. "Ha, a musician, I see?" he remarked with condescension.

"Pierre Perroquet, at your service." Only a slight instability among the limbs prevented the accompanying bow.

"A Frenchman?"

"Not altogether, Monsieur. Three stars danced on my birth-night. French, Spanish and Portuguese. My father the one, my mother the other, my birthplace the third. And you?"

"And I — Johann Chrysostomus Wolfgang Amadeus —"

"Mozart?" asked Perroquet, startled out of his life, unable to believe his ears.

The stranger laughed shortly. He seemed gratified now, in a cynical way. "Dumarque!" he said biting.

"Pardon. I thought perhaps a son, a relation. I revere the master so much. The same name—it seemed impossible."

"At least you have a good memory."

"Yes, indeed. It is my chief talent."

"And this is mine." He raised his right arm in a graceful gesture. A courtly and yet deadly meaning seemed associated with that particular movement. All at once Perroquet noticed a very long, very elegant rapier at his side.

"Yes, the possession of a long blade is at least as valuable as that of a long memory," said the stranger. "The one may encumber a man with unwanted and even painful associations: the other may rid him of them."

This vague threat and its daring significance stirred everybody. It was well known that the private use of the rapier had long been forbidden: the very purchasing of one was nowadays difficult to accomplish, and the allusion to any acquaintance with duelling an expression of arrogant defiance.

The stranger had had his will, at least. The attention of the whole assembly was riveted upon him.

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At this moment a light broke upon Perroguet. "Not *Dumerque*, the most noted swordsman of all the Courts of Europe?" he asked, gasping.

The stranger smiled, for the first time. There was no need to acknowledge it further.

Everybody looked aghast. They all suddenly recollect ed the name of this famous individual. At once each began to hope he had not said to the stranger anything that might be considered in any way offensive. . . .

"Certainly the Courts of Europe are not unknown to me," he announced. "Napoleon himself has attended, entranced, for over an hour, to watch me at the fence. Affairs of honour have been entrusted to my keeping, safely and with satisfactory results, by crowned heads and by ladies who shall be nameless." His manner expressed in itself the supremely exalted position of the unmentionable ladies.

He turned to Perroguet in a pointed manner. "At what house of opera, in which orchestra, do you perform?"

Through the haze of wine-fumes Perroguet looked across the table into the dark mocking eyes of his vis-à-vis. It was quite clear to him the man had deliberately staged an insult.

"I am Perroguet," he said slowly and distinctly. "Have I not said so? I carry my songs in my heart. I do not buy them at two sous the page from the music-sellers, or copy the worn-out score of *Mlle Diaphine de l'Opéra Française!*"

"In other words," said Dumerque, "you are, I take it, an unemployed and vagabond minstrel. A pestilential crew. They are one of the things which the Emperor Napoleon has proclaimed in the Republic of the New Era shall be put down."

Having thus successfully exhibited his superiority over his humble rival, the stranger turned his back upon him, addressing his attention once more to the assembly, which had by this time somewhat diminished, but whose notice appeared for some reason to be essential to him.

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" You, and your rapier ! " shouted Perroguet suddenly, rising to his feet. " Sacré nom de Dieu ! Who the hell do you think you are ? Who are you, to flap your wings and crow your head off ? Others beside yourself have a right to exist. Yes, you can cut, you can feint, you can riposte and reprise, you can thrust through the heart with the quickness of a cat. Oh, I have heard all about you. But can you sing one chanson that will charm a whole village ? One ballad, one chacras of the Portuguese ? Can you hold a multitude and give them back the dreams of their youth, or fill them with pride in deeds they could never have accomplished ? If you deal death, I bestow life. Yes, even to the trees, the skies, the pale flowers under the hill." It must be admitted Perroguet was *not* perfectly aware of what he was saying. His blood was pounding in his veins, the heady essences of the wine sang against his ears.

" Come now, I challenge you ! " he cried. " One song from the frequenter of Courts ! One little, little, little song. Just an air, a few notes only. To prove the small skill it takes to be a musician ! "

The stranger was silent with fury and contempt.

Perroguet leapt right over the table and seized him by the lapel of his blue coat. " No ? You deny my challenge ? You ignore it ? Then, Monsieur, there is no alternative, I must engage myself against you at *your* game. Yes, easily done. You have your weapon, I can procure one. We shall see, ha ha, we shall see which needs the most skill, patience, knowledge—and to start it, here's *that* ! " He hit him on the cheek with his open hand.

Hardly aware of his words, forgetting that he knew nothing of fencing, Perroguet felt only an inner power driving him forward without thought. As if disassociated with his stern words, his knees were trembling, as a result of the wine and his righteous indignation.

But the stranger was white to the lips.

" You pale, Monsieur ? "

Turning his dark eyes in a cosmic revolution, Dumerque

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leant forward hollowly. "Monsieur, if I do, it is solely because I have no desire to add one more to my list of victims."

Perroguet's trembling redoubled. "Here, no more words. . . . Let us go into the courtyard," he said desperately. He turned and went quickly out of the public room. Just at the door, he had seen, hanging on a nail, an old rusty sabre from the Egyptian wars. He snatched this down. On his heels stumbled Dumerque. With indifference the other occupants of the tavern watched them go. They thought the little drunken scene was over. They thought Perroguet was going out to be sick.

Outside they faced each other. A glow still lingered in the Western sky, and opposite this a slender moon hung motionless. From a lighted window a brilliant rectangle fell across the dark court.

Perroguet knew no more than what every man knows of cut, thrust and recoil. He held his weapon steadily and looked at his opponent's eyes.

"*En garde!*" shouted Dumerque. At once they engaged. The blades clashed together, then dropped at arm's length awkwardly. Three times Dumerque leapt forward, appeared to strike, and leapt back. Something in some way familiar seemed to accompany the spectacle of his actions, but of his skill and technique Perroguet was in no way qualified to judge. Some minutes had passed before any decisive blow had been dealt by either side.

The chill evening air began to dispel Perroguet's vapours. His heat left him. A cold fear crept into his heart. He wondered what he was doing there, fighting for his life with an old rusty sabre he did not know how to use. At that moment his adversary leapt forward again and with one quick lunge thrust his weapon's point hard and sharply against his body. And by that very impact the weapon fell with a clatter upon the cobbled stones of the courtyard. As if spell-bound, they both stared at it, as it lay there, glittering in the shaft of light.

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Its long shining blade had buckled up into a C, the hilt stuck uppermost, catching the beam from the window of the house. Underneath the hilt was a tin plaque labelled, "Property of the Comédie Française, Opéra Comique, Paris."

Dumerque saw this. Perroguet saw this. Very, very slowly a comprehension began to come to him.

Dumerque threw up his arms, tore open his coat (the one with the copper buttons) and thrust forward his bared chest into the light. "Now kill me! Kill me!" he cried in a voice torn with so intense an agony that even his theatrical gesture could not deny it. "Now you know all. The truth is, I am an actor. Jean Henri Dumerque, a poor actor of Paris. That is why I was jealous of you. And even that is not all. You shall know the whole truth." His voice cracked. "The truth is, I cannot fence."

"Honour is satisfied," said Perroguet with extreme drunken gravity. He put down his sabre very carefully, point downwards, against the wall. He, too, opened his coat, and with an immense sigh he drew out from within it that which had turned the point and buckled the metal of the toy rapier.

It was almost a complete suit of armour—breast, side-pieces and back; and it was composed of thick pads of paper covered all over, very black and very fine, with musical scores.

"The truth is," said Perroguet, "I have no memory."

A great sadness fell upon them both. They stood dazed and bewildered. Dumerque recovered first. With a gesture of the theatre that he could not resist, he held out a shaking hand. "Brothers, at least," he said brokenly.

In silence they picked up their belongings. Tottering, they supported each other's footsteps out of the court. To enter again the public drinking-room was more than either of them could bear. Something else, something quite different, was required for men who had just gone through so much. . . .

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They repaired, therefore, to a chemist. On the way, already, Dumerque began to recover his poise. After all, it is not everyone who has fought in a duel. He was pleased to see with what concern and curiosity the little chemist looked up, as he entered, pale and apparently wounded.

"An—an accident," murmured Dumerque hollowly.

The chemist put on his enormous horn-rimmed glasses. "No bones broken, I hope, gentlemen?" He fussed about him, helping him to a chair, and feeling him all over for any suspected fracture. "Ah, that is all right. Perfectly sound, so far. Well now, what does Monsieur require? Is it a draught, perhaps, to settle the nerves? Where does Monsieur feel the pain?—No pain? Well, then, let me see. Perhaps a little blood-letting, eh? Often of greatest value. I myself will willingly officiate, if necessary. In any case, there is a chirurgeon——"

"No," said Perroguet decisively. "That is the very thing we have successfully avoided." He, too, was coming to himself.

Dumerque looked annoyed.

"Ah, I see," said the chemist. "Well, well, I think I can make you up a concoction, or rather an infusion, that will serve admirably for your needs. If you will just wait for a second or two. It will not take long. My little vessel is just on the boil."

He gave them tea. "A stimulant," explained the chemist, "of the very finest nature. No unpleasant after-effects. No disagreeable odour. Take your time, gentlemen. It is hot at present. Yet I should suggest your drinking it before it altogether cools." He named its price, and turned to greet a new customer.

Perroguet pulled out a fistful of coins, two gold and some silver. For a moment he stared at them in amazement, so accustomed was he to finding only copper in his pockets. So much seemed to have occurred, too, since their acquisition.

From farther along the counter, a rather dirty-looking man, with a knitted red cap, leaning on his elbow, stared

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at them too. He glanced with curiosity at Perroguet and the languid, brightly dressed figure of his companion.

The tea was drunk, paid for, and finished with. With polite expressions of regard and wishes for prosperity the two late antagonists parted at the door of the shop. When he had gone a few paces Perroguet realised he did not know his direction. He must ask, of course. There was a man in the road just alongside him.

Strangely enough, it was the same man of the chemist's shop in the red cap. "Excuse me, can you direct me to the Pré du Concord where the Circus is being held to-night?"

"Ah, a stranger to the town, I see." Two pig's eyes looked at him greedily. "Certainly I can direct you. If you will walk beside me I am almost certain I shall be able to conduct you personally to the place. Unfortunately, it is a good long way off. But I can perceive my friend is a good walker. Ah, let me see now. Was it to the right we should have gone? These streets are the very devil, so narrow, so dark, and all exactly alike. My friend is lucky to have stumbled upon a man who, fortunately, knows them like the palm of his own hand."

All this was said in a kind of singsong patter, the while the speaker advanced at an extremely rapid pace through the dark alleys. It was all Perroguet could do to keep up with him. He even had to break into a trot at intervals so as not to lose touch with his guide. He barked his shins on the sharp corners of walls, and several times stumbled over the heaps of mire in the road. At last he was quite breathless, hot and exhausted. Just then his talkative companion slowed up, paused, and seemed overwhelmed with confusion.

"How could I have done it?" he exclaimed passionately. "How could I have made the mistake of an imbecile? Just that last little turning I must have taken wrong. But it is nothing. A small matter. Luckily, there is a house near where they will be able to direct us."

Looking up, Perroguet found they were just opposite

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a mean-looking liquor-house. A small and withered green bush was over its door. This was the only sign of respectability it seemed to possess.

Without giving him time for thought, his guide pushed him through the opening.

A dense and overheated atmosphere greeted him like a slap between the eyes. In a knot at one corner of the room a number of men were drinking: at the other end a fat, yellow-haired, youngish woman was arranging bottles. A look, a word seemed to pass to this woman from the red-capped man.

At once she rose and came towards Perroguet, smiling. He discovered to his surprise that he was tremendously thirsty. She seemed to know it at once. She offered him a drink so beguilingly that he could feel already the cool satisfaction of it after his long, heating journey.

"For a minute, eh, mon brave?" enquired the red-cap, also raising a glass. "A drink never does a man harm. Besides, in any case, the Circus does not commence till nine o'clock."

But what was very curious, the drink did not cool Perroguet. Indeed, it made him thirstier than ever. A burning as of fire began to be felt in his throat and stomach. "Tea," he thought; "that's what comes of taking it. Chemist's concoctions! How foolish ever to indulge in them."

The more he drank, the more he felt this. Big red and yellow globes began to dance before his eyes. The wooden floor, with the knot of men at the end of it, rose up violently like one plank and hit the ceiling, and then slowly subsided with a sickening shudder. The woman's face with the yellow hair whirled round and round like a tee-to-tum. He tried to stop it, to ask her if *she* knew what was wrong with everything, and why he was on fire in his inside, and whether his clothes would catch alight as a result of it. But when he tried to say this, he found he could not. He turned to look for the man with the red cap, but he was invisible.

Everything was blurred. There was nothing solid at

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all. Nothing but the snatches of songs that rose into his mind and burst out of his lips. They were solid, they were hard and hurt his tongue. He had to shout loudly so as to get rid of them.

A feeling of complete weightlessness invaded him. He had now no longer any body, no legs, no arms. He was floating in space, his head only suspended on the air. All physical touch with the earthly world had vanished. Only a pulse drummed furiously within his brain. Or rather, it was a drum itself, banging out incessantly a monotonous and familiar rhythm. Ta—*pom—pom—pom!* Ta—*pom—pom—pom!* Ta—*pom—pom—pom!*

“*Le petit RAT de Dijon!*” roared Perroguet.

It was the last thing he remembered.

When he came to himself, he was lying in the ditch at a roadside. It was light, an afternoon. He could not recognise where he was. His mouth burned, his body ached all over from cold and exposure. His brain, which was splitting, seemed to have been emptied of all reference to time, place, or occasion.

He sat up, feeling his numbed and aching limbs, slowly trying to understand. It must have rained, since he lay there, his clothes were soaking. Weakly, trembling, gradually gaining consciousness, he pushed his hands against them, squeezing out the wet. . . .

And then he discovered another thing. His pockets had been emptied, too.

By degrees, like the dawning of light, the realisation of this, with all its significances, both as cause and result, came flooding upon him. The yellow tousled head and the red cap nodded together again confidentially over the bottles. . . . Here he was, weak, ill, and quite penniless : the long day's work for the Mayor thrown away, wasted : and that immortal glimmer that was to form into a melody with the dancing of the silver child lost to him for ever.

The Circus had left the town two days before. He never saw it again.

C H A P T E R I V

I

AS for Andrea and Sebastian and Suki they were gone, who knows whither? To each his trade, to each his life's portion. "'*Muchos caminos al ceilo,*' Andrea's saying," reflected Perroguet as the idea of Andrea and also another idea to which he hardly as yet gave admittance caused him in his wanderings to turn south again, edging always a little nearer Spain.

A thoughtfulness had fallen upon him. The adventure of the Circus had emphasised his position—alone, friendless, without a home. He began to regret his folly in parting so readily from his companions at the nod of a feeling he could not even define.

Cooking his food, eating it in silence and solitude, perhaps in a disused woodman's hut, perhaps by a spring at the edge of the highway, he dwelt sadly on the anger he had felt sometimes against Andrea, his absurd resentment when Andrea gulped food and drink as one. Yes, there was plenty of time, here, to think about one's past life, one's follies, and last year's friends.

As he began to travel west the large towns seemed fewer, or else he avoided them. Here were no taverns for quick exchanges of fellowship and mirth. Instead were the hills only, rising ever higher, cutting out the sky from east to west, with passes between them that were deep and treacherous. He was thankful to fall in with a party of shepherds, conducting their flocks of merinos from one country to the other.

In their company the passage of the Pyrenees was made, but at the end, when the last spurs of the hills broadened out and flowed away into wide shoulder on

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shoulder, the shepherds turned off towards the valleys, driving their flocks to pasture.

The people on the other side of the border were hospitable and friendly. The little farms and villages were clean, combining, as it seemed, the better qualities of both nations. But they were scattered far apart. The roads between them were long, hilly, and not always in good repair.

Roads, roads ! An endless ribbon that joined one year to the next, that stretched back into one's life, and forward too, with the same blank, expressionless, and yet commanding stare. Sunset, sunrise ; winter, summer, and autumn.

Loneliness. That was the bottom of it.

You look in at village homes as you pass. They are cosily lighted up in the evening. The lamplight shines through the red curtains, throwing the shadow of the leaf and flower in the pot. Within, a fire is burning, food is cooking in the big kettle. The smoke goes out of the warm, calm room and reaches up into the sky like the quiet, safe requests to God from the people's hearts. A baby, rolled in a knitted brown blanket, is asleep in a corner. Give us more children, God, give us a good harvest, corn, olives, wine . . .

In the daytime the house doors are open. You can see the folk inside. Usually they are very poor. Care and the rough winds have furrowed their brows, their faces are thin and tanned with the sun. The tables, the beds, the cooking-pots appear shabby and old, they shrink into the darkness of the interiors as if ashamed and tired. Suddenly, one day, a girl comes to the door, and without any reason she smiles at you.

Your heart misses a beat, and then thumps a wild gallop. Thoughts pour, without control, into your brain.

"Am I born to be a bachelor ? Am I, of all, to be solitary all my life ? The beasts and the flowers mate, live, die, contented, in their own country. Lairs they have all, and nests, and fertile earth. And men are married at my age—have a child or two. . . . This girl

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is smiling at me. How pleasant to live where you are loved and wanted, where somebody knows when you go out and come in . . ." You smile back at the girl in the farm.

Then suddenly you see she has thick wrists, red elbows, a coarse waist. A hand pale as a flower swims into your thoughts holding an enormous black fan, the beautiful and fragile hand of that merry Condessa. . . . Your thoughts change, and flicker down, and sadden. "For where could I find a woman who would care to share my life? Sleeping under hedges. Drinking spring water. Tramping from place to place. Always without a future, save as some repetition of the past. Yet I cannot change my life. For if I gave it up, what could I do then? No one village could support me at my trade, I am old to learn another. No, for me the road, the friendliness only of the sun, the conversation of brooks, the consolation of the night-sky and the breeze.

" Yet their company is cold, the wind's communications are without heart. I am tired of the night-sky. My thoughts hurt me, they swing from one balance to another, finding nowhere peace."

The same round ever, the same roads. The only hope that one may encounter, from time to time, friends who travel the same way: meeting them again a little farther on in their journey, a few years older, sadder, or happier, wiser perhaps, or perhaps only in the midst of some new adventure.

But a few autumns later, with a deep pleasure whose intensity he could scarce account for, Perroguet ran across Andrea again. In a mellow valley near the source of the Guadiana, on a smooth road flowing between hills of oak and chestnut, he overtook him. It seemed to be their fate to meet in the dying time of the year.

The little hunchback was shuffling along cheerfully, his pack evidently not heavily weighted, his thick staff banging on the road. Seen from the rise above, he seemed like a sturdy beetle going home.

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"*Hola!*!" shouted Perroguet, hollowing his hands. At once Andrea turned, his face showing up in the clear sunshine, even at that distance, in every detail. A network of furrows shot across its walnut-coloured surface as he grinned. He slipped the strap of his pack from his forehead, let it down to earth, and sat on it, waiting. Perroguet shouted again with sheer joy, waved his arm, and started running down the slope at full speed.

They embraced, saluting on both cheeks. "Come, come, this is a pleasant encounter," said Andrea with satisfaction. "I wondered, my friend, whether you had been knocked on the head in St. Etienne. I searched for you everywhere there, but could not find you, and I had to move on. There was a riot there, a week later, I heard, and the Mayor's house was all smashed up to bits."

Andrea was full of news and importance. Great things, apparently, had been happening to him since last the two had met. He began to recite them in chronological order. "Only think, my friend," he exclaimed as they took the road together, "soon after leaving you, I was granted an unusual and flattering experience." He threw off his adventures, rolling them round his tongue in sonorous words. He loved to describe minutely, raising a very clear picture of scenes he had witnessed.

"Ah, it is the business of certain people to be always present when something of interest is taking place. One would say almost they drew great happenings towards them. You—you have wandered about, merely, my poor friend. But as for me—listen." He took a deep breath and was off.

"Travelling one day on the road from Fontainebleau, reading one of my old books as I went along, half doubled, and not thinking of political matters, suddenly I met a great concourse of people! Some were running and shouting, some were kneeling by the roadside in the snow, some were marching with triumph as if in the van of the cavalcade of some illustrious personage. As for me, I was hustled aside into the ditch soon enough, I can

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tell you. Up to my waist in icy mud and water, I shouted out to ask what was coming ? Would you believe it, my friend, actually I had stumbled across the path of His Holiness Pope Pius the Seventh, on his way from Lyons. The throng, which rapidly increased, was surging to and fro, churning up the slush, snow, mire ; all the people hailing with delight such as I have never before witnessed the appearance of the Pontiff on the soil of France !

" All at once, with a tremendous commotion, an on-coming crowd appeared also in the opposite direction. Horsemen were all over the road, and advancing towards each other, mixed with the populace : where the streams meet (I thought in my ditch), poor Andrea will be trodden under. There was a hawthorn-tree growing by the ditch : yet, in spite of his hump, what did Andrea do but climb into it, like Zaccheus, and to see, too, a king, both of the Church and the State, though not in the one person, like that other. For coming down the road, from the opposite end, was the retinue of Napoleon, whom I should now call Emperor. Under my nose they met. Napoleon had leapt from his coach, and running forwards on foot, like a boy, he opened the carriage door and saluted the Holy Father with fervour. It was on my side the door opened ; I looked, my friend, right into the heart of the carriage. Very fine black eyebrows the Pope has, and a dark, tired and anxious sort of look : his hair is very long and untidy. He had a velvet travelling-cape lined with a white fur, and under that a crimson silk skirt that buttoned all the way down in front with small gilt buttons. Some yellow lace fell over his hands, where shone, above his travelling-gloves, a huge and brilliant green stone in a ring. The shadow of this jewel fell right across his knees like a rod. All this was seen in a flash as the sun slanted into the carriage and the Pope looked out at Napoleon. Then suddenly he smiled, the old man. A world of light came into his eyes, all his fears vanished. Napoleon leapt into the carriage and embraced him. Plick ! the door shut : I saw no more than the wheels revolving in the slush, and the horsemen and the crowd pressing on behind, with the

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shouts from the people that a new era had dawned
When they had all gone I came down from my tree and
followed them to Paris in a fruit-cart."

"My friend, you travel easily," said Perroguet with some envy.

"Yes. Everyone gives a lift to the hunchback. Then they like to see what I have, too. Certainly I open my tray for them: how the light sparkles on the needles and scissors! How they finger the silver ribbons and tissues! This passes the time. They do not buy, of course, but I am paying for my journey. Suddenly we find we have almost gained Paris. The concourse is immense, we can hardly get in at the gates. Everyone is saying that now the Emperor is to be crowned a totally new state of affairs in the world is about to set in. Everyone is dying to talk about the Emperor, and about the Pope, Pius the Seventh. Aha, I am lucky, I have seen them both. Never have I sold so quickly as when I am describing the crusted gilt buttons that fasten His Holiness's skirt. As for the lace, and the velvet travelling-cloak, they are the greatest boon of all. 'Best Frankfurt velvet,' is all I say, and, instead of adding as hitherto, 'practically given away,' I announce simply, '*as worn by His Holiness the Pope!*' Even his ring, too, that huge green one, helps to sell my Rhinestones, and my silver tinsel."

Perroguet grinned with pleasure. He understood all this acutely. It was in his line, too.

"Well, my friend, it is true, certainly events stupendous in their magnitude are daily taking place. See, in a few days the Pope is seen at the Pavillon de Flore. I am among the hordes that hourly surround the palaces—on the outskirts, you understand. There is always a chance for a pedlar in a crowd so big that only a few can hope actually to see the spectacle. For that is what they want, a glimpse of the Pope. Continually, he presents himself, with the Emperor alongside, on the balcony of the Tuileries. Oh, the fervour of those people! No one could have dreamt they had ever worshipped the Goddess of Reason. As for me, you know, my friend, I hold my

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tongue. How easily I could denounce both Reason and Rome together, if I were minded!"

"But couldn't they *both*—I mean, I feel sometimes, perhaps, one should give way—in a sense," murmured Perroguet slowly. Since his unmasking at the duel he had begun to feel a little differently about many things.

"That's because you are a fool, my friend!" said Andrea with conviction. "As for giving way—did Napoleon? Not he. I was outside Notre Dame hours before the Coronation. I took my pitch just near the big doors. The horses of the police of the National Guard escorting the Pope scattered the people again and again: as for me, I just slipped behind the doors; there I was, safe from the hoofs. When the hubbub was over, I merely squeezed out again, and there I was, still in the best place! Once one of the sergeants caught me by the arm, ready to fling me out. By good luck it was Pierre Toulain, he whose wife loves the red satins. 'Three metres for your wife,' I whispered quickly, 'won't that make a well-loved husband?' So I stayed. The crowd always gathered again. Presently the Emperor appeared in his glass coach, surrounded by his Marshals on horseback. A little boy in gold surmounted the coach, and through the glass walls you could see Napoleon in his costume of the theatre—I mean his plumed bonnet and round cloak. What a buffoon, eh? Then he dismounted, and the guards closed round him, and somebody jogged an elbow in my face, and I saw no more. On foot he is lost: he is a small man, Napoleon. Nevertheless, one more glimpse I had of him, through the crack of the hinge of the door. He was just within the Cathedral, on his head was a golden wreath, and at his side someone carried on a cushion the gigantic crown——"

"Ah, I heard something about that . . ." said Perroguet importantly. "Someone told me . . ."

Andrea hated to be interrupted. His small eye glinted.

"You did, my friend. We all heard. I could not see, of course, the ceremony: but afterwards everybody whispered, everybody talked, everybody shouted with

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laughter! And I heard. Oh, yes, even poor old Andrea heard about it too. For the Pope had come to crown Napoleon, but Napoleon insisted on crowning himself. There was the crown, and both of them tugging at it. By a quick move the Emperor thinks to wrest it from the Pope's grasp, but the old man hangs on, hangs on like a leech. To and fro they rock, wrangling. The crown has been cheaply made—alas, the poor Treasury!—some of the jewels fall out. The ladies of the Court cannot resist making a grab for them. Who shall blame them? After all, you have to sleep with the Emperor at least a dozen times to get a stone a quarter the size! At last, maddened by the conflict, the Emperor, lifting his foot, delivers such a buffet to the paunch of his rival that his Holiness topples right over backwards on to the floor of Nôtre Dame! His red skirts go up in a balloon. My friend, would you believe it, he wears frilled white-lace drawers! But the Crown is still firmly retained by the little ex-Corporal who now places it upon his own head. As for the half-caste Josephine, she is almost a lunatic between weeping and laughter. Kneeling as she is, she finds herself obliged to lift the train of Napoleon's Coronation robe to wipe her eyes. . . . Yes, the little boys in Paris made a song about it. You might learn it, Perroguet, it goes like this . . . There was a coarse, vulgar riddle, too! Very, very witty. Listen!—”

Perroguet was terribly uncomfortable. What an unfortunate affair. Worse, a great deal, than he could possibly have guessed. A sort of—well, shocking lack of dignity, among the Great. Of course, one could never be sure that Andrea was accurate, or even telling the truth. And yet, on the other hand, it was impossible to know what to believe, nowadays. Such extraordinary things *did* happen. . . . Suddenly he glanced at Andrea's face. It was wreathed in ecstasy.

Down came Perroguet's discomfort with a run. He leant against a tree and laughed. How he laughed, Perroguet! Andrea eyed him coldly.

“Yes, my friend, for a moment you thought I was being

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vulgar. You thought I was belittling the Emperor, making fun of the Pope, committing some terrible crimes. Well, to begin with, there's a lot of naturalness in vulgarity. Never forget that. And one step, only, between ridiculous and sublime—Napoleon's own saying, by the way. As for Popes and Emperors, they live right in the eye of the sun. I am only a poor pedlar. I observe, I notice, I recount. That is all. Nothing is left for me but to brag of the great, of the stupendous things that I have seen."

"Did you see the Circus?" asked Perroguet involuntarily. It was a silly thing to say, and Andrea looked at him with contempt.

II

Yet they continued to travel together. Watching the simple enjoyments of his friend Andrea, wondered curiously at his contentment. No glimpse of that inner longing showed itself in the finely bronzed face; and indeed Andrea would never have suspected such an intellectual gesture. He began to think that pleasure derives from limited capacity—a pebble will make a child happy. (And after all, who can be more than happy?) Pleasure, in fact, comes from within. Pooh! how banal, put into words. That's the worst of great thoughts—ungrasped, they dazzle, filling the mind with a strangely new radiance: catch them, force them into sound, they turn out into nothing but a frowsty old platitude. Pah!

Perroguet, on his part, learnt an immense amount from the queer books Andrea carried. In these, customs of the past were depicted curiously, sometimes with illustrations in coloured inks pressed from raised blocks of wood; sometimes in fine lines and whorls of gold. These Andrea would not let him touch or handle. They were each special orders and extremely valuable. But in the evenings, as it grew lighter, the hunchback, proud of his attainments, would read to him from an ancient tome.

"Thus the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, in Germany, and King Richard Cœur-de-Lion in England, invited

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Provençal knights to give instruction in ceremonies of chivalry. For there were four stationary Courts of Love in Provence ; at Pierrefeu, at Ramaguy, at Aix, and at Avignon. Of notable Troubadours, William the Ninth, Count of Poitou, and Duke of Aquitaine, excelled in pastourelles, in aubades, retrouanges, and redondes : Cœur-de-Lion and his harper Blondel in chanzos, small songs of war : Arnant Daniel was acclaimed the most excellent author of tensomes, or jocs partitz : but Arnauld de Maraviglia, who was devoted to the noble lady of De Beziers, sang only the following stanza : '*A Dieu mon âme, Ma vie au roi, Mon cœur aux dames, L'honneur pour moi !*' It is pleasant to consider the joyous companies of ladies and knights under fragrant olive and orange groves, attended by Moorish story-tellers and the Jongleurs who accompanied the Troubadours. The Baroness sits in the circle of ladies, judging the songs of knights contending in rhymes respecting the Laws of Love, at the close pronouncing her sentence—'*L'arrêt d'amour.*'"

Thus agreeably passed the time as the two strolled westward. For Andrea was making his way to Madrid to replenish his stores, and also to seek a warm hibernation for the winter.

Wherever they stopped he sold something, if it was only a card of cotton it lightened his pack. Always with an eye cocked on Perroquet, he took pleasure in chatting with the inhabitants of villages.

He would spread out a piece of muslin, or some cards of buttons. "Now, you, you have lived here a long time. Tell me, what do you think of the present Parisian fashions ? "

"Disgraceful ! I hear the young women go about Paris barefooted, in sandals, and with skirts slashed to the knee ! At least let it not spread here ! In my young days such debauchery would never have been permitted. No, we were brought up correctly, thank the Virgin ! I have never countenanced laxity, and I never will. Frankness they call it nowadays. Eh, eh ! I don't know

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what the world is coming to. People seem to be losing their heads!"

"Don't forget it isn't very long since the people of France lost their heads in fact," Andrea would say, grinning; "*they* were considered the wicked ones, those old ones. Yet their skirts were like balloons, and reached the ground all round. Yes, Grandma, it is an interesting world. Very interesting and very curious."

Wherever he went he related the Napoleonic adventures that sold his wares, though seldom twice in the same way.

And just at sunset one evening they approached the high mud walls of Madrid.

"The Posada of Monte Calvario, an old-fashioned one, but comfortable, will gladly receive us. Was it not through me, a compatriot, that Baltazar received twenty-five litres of French brandy at a time when none was obtainable?" With this prospect Andrea brightened their hearts as they entered the town.

Monte Calvario, however, appeared to have been considerably altered since Andrea's last visit. To begin with, a grand new front in bright yellow paint had been affixed over the whole façade: while the old-fashioned green bush, with 'Calvario' written round its middle, was practically obliterated by a wooden sign announcing the inn, in the most modern manner, as Il Posada del Progreso, Baltazar Vasquez.

And the cheerful brown face of Vasquez himself seemed changed too: for all his progress a glint of uneasiness charged his dark eye.

"For me, a good bed for the winter," said Andrea. "For my friend—he will arrange for himself."

Vasquez inspected Perroguet. "You are a French merchant's servant, I suppose, on your way to join your master at one of the fairs?" Perroguet indicated his profession. Vasquez was charmed. "Aha, this is good. You will entertain the company in the evenings? Keep them quiet, eh? Contented, silent?"

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"Certainly I will entertain the company in the evenings."

The host made a step to the door, and came back again. "Not *every* evening, of course," he said hastily, "the same face, the same tunes—people would go elsewhere." With a shudder Perroguet agreed. "As for yourself—there is a stable where mules used to be kept. Since the door has broken away it has been impossible to keep the mules from being stolen, save only those *malos machos* that are sufficiently savage to spring upon and rend any intruder. I think only one is there now. Still, it is a large stable." Vasquez broke off as the water-carrier came past. . . . "Excuse me—round to the right."

With this alarming prospect in view Perroguet made his way in the direction indicated. A trembling bray revealed the whereabouts of the stable without a door. Perroguet, with great caution, looked within. Evidently the *macho* had not been sufficiently *malo*, for it had been stolen already. A meek and worn-out donkey had, for some inexplicable reason, been substituted. The straw was plentiful, nevertheless, and in one corner, thrown off no doubt by the *macho's* struggles in resisting capture, was a still serviceable mule-blanket.

CHAPTER V

I

AND very happily no doubt Perroquet would have settled down in his winter quarters but for that uneasy glint in their host's eye which bred discomfort.

Indeed, before they had been there two days it was clear to both visitors that something unusual and subterranean was astir. True, the people never were fond of work, that was nothing: but now they hung about all day exchanging dark glances in the Puerto del Sol, wrapped in their long cloaks within whose shelter smouldered their paper segars and their unfinished sentences: their round black sombreros nod-nodded together mysteriously around the braseros in house and tavern. In dark groups, cocooned by swathes of smoke, they squatted on the benches in the Posada del Progreso, delivering their uneasy souls.

"Junot is at Bayonne with thirty thousand men, I had it to-day from my wife's brother, a courier. Would you kindly tell me why Napoleon is heaping up troops here, there, and everywhere, upon our borders? What is threatened? Why do we hear nothing? Why are we kept in the dark, troops all round us, gathering westwards? I will tell you." (A knee tapped, a brown hand hollowed.) "An invasion of Portugal. Mark my words. They first, us next."—"But are they blind, our rulers? Do they hand us as a sacrifice to the French butcher? If there is none to protect us—"—"Our rulers, Pedro, you speak well! A harlot and her paramour! As for the Prince of Peace—" (Here a coarse epithet.) "Our beloved Prince Ferdinand, would *he* were throned! The king already an imbecile, everyone knows

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it——” A hand clapped over the speaker’s mouth, a hasty cough, a shuffle of feet, a glance at anyone who had heard. The words died away in mutterings, revolving on their own axis, as on a cloudless day sounds the distant and threatening roll of thunder.

Andrea went quietly from house to house exhibiting his wares. The wives bought. After all, one must live, one must be clad, pedlars are cheaper than shops. And Perroquet, too, went through the streets, leaning at corners out of the bitter winds, and playing at the doors of eating-houses. He did pretty well. Crowds, even those drawn by discontent, will generally favour a musician. But their temper was dark and suspicious ; Perroquet, child of all countries, absorbed it instantly. The very absence of news spun their nerves so thin they could hardly bear the weight of each day’s toil. Over them, like a dark enormous hand, hung the mystery surrounding the schemes of Napoleon. The fate of Portugal possessed their minds like an ache : and under this the subterranean murmurs ran, swelled, twisted. It was clear to Perroquet that on entering Madrid he and Andrea had plunged their hands into a seething political cauldron.

And following rapidly upon their arrival, as if attendant upon the person of Andrea, as if drawn out of the unresisting air that surrounded his comings and goings, great and startling events began to take place in the city.

Andrea himself could not forbear remarking on this phenomenon. “ What a dust we kick up, as the fly said to the cart-wheel,” murmured Perroquet (Andrea at once repented some of the learning he had imparted) : but even as he spoke there rushed into the Posada one bearing news that caused every person to leap to his feet in startled dismay.

“ Ferdinand ! ” he cried, dashing his words from his lips in frenzy. “ Our beloved Prince, the King’s son, without any warning, clapped into prison ! This afternoon, now. The news has just come from the Escorial ; there he is, our only hope, arrested, suddenly, locked up ! ” His words choked him.

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"In God's name, what for, why?"

"How can I tell? To vent the spite of Godoy. To help throw us to Napoleon. Anything that is wrong and against the people. Anything absurd and fantastic. They said he was charged with conspiring against the life of the Queen, and of robbing the King of his crown."

In one moment everyone had rushed from the posada and was in the street shouting and exchanging the news. The whole city was in an uproar. From every house people poured into the plazas and calles, voicing without reticence their loyalty to Ferdinand, Prince of Asturias, and their rejection of the calumny that impugned him, which could be due only to the treacherous machinations of the devil Emanuel Godoy, the Prince of Peace. Angry fists were shaken, ugly threats uttered. Hatred and suspicion swept all classes, even the rich cosy merchants in the Calle Montera; a sense of insecurity shook their long beards, made their coins rattle as they hid them, trembling. Ah, perhaps it was only a rumour after all; this is, we all know, a city of rumours, usually unfounded. . . . Wait a few days, wait a few days, all will be normal again. . . . This feeble shelter of comfort was exploded almost at once, to the intense consternation of the citizens, by the formal decree and proclamation of the King, which, pasted upon all the chief buildings and squares, exposed to his subjects in all details the supposed plot of Ferdinand.

It was enough. The clouds muttering on the horizon now burst, like a storm-clap, over the city. The people were frantic. Their thoughts, on the venomed pointer, turned inwards. Under the fierce light of their terrors, every crack in the social structure gaped like a death-wound. The debauched state of the Army, the Navy, the finances, the general administration, leaped into the mind, presaging clearly the imminent dissolution of the kingdom. And added to this was the failing health of the imbecile monarch, the steadily increasing power of the Queen's lover, the Prince of Peace: who, besides being Grand Admiral of the Navy, and Generalissimo of

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the Army, had also, it was at once recalled, with fury and bitterness, just appointed himself Chief Controller of the King's Household, and the principal Power in the Palace, with the name of Serene Highness, the august title of royalty. It was this feared, hated, imposing authority that had triumphed in the suppression of Ferdinand.

By means of spies and messengers, the closest possible touch was kept with the beloved Prince during his confinement ; and in the midst of all the rumours, threats, fears and denunciations it was learned suddenly that the prisoner, in whose innocence all still believed, had appealed to the Emperor Napoleon for protection.

On the wings of this news a violent overturning of feeling convulsed the city : settling presently in a united though unexpected direction. The dreaded conqueror, the suspected invader, now changed miraculously into a saviour filled with reason and charity. His many good qualities were remembered, extolled, exaggerated. His resourcefulness in war, his generosity in peace, his power, above all. Soon the Prince's further proposal, which, though written from his seclusion, immediately became public property, that he might be allowed to unite himself to a Princess of France, to further the hoped-for delivery, was commended loudly on all sides. Yes, by all means join the fortunes of the Bourbons with the Buonapartes !

The Posada of Progress was crowded night after night. Vasquez, the owner, was troubled, nevertheless. The uneasy glint deepened, just when things seemed to be going all right. "Yes, my friend," he said to Perroguet one evening, "political excitements make throats thirsty, draw money out of pockets, but also they break windows, chairs, crockery. . . ." He could still recall the damages following the news of the disaster of Trafalgar.

He glanced anxiously at the large, sparsely furnished room, and outside, where in contrast the stables were crammed with mules, stallions, donkeys, and servants. "Bien vienes, si vienes sola !" he cried bitterly, addressing misfortune. Perroguet's sympathy was instinctive. He was much indebted to this good man for the use of

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the shed and the straw. How thankfully he rolled himself nightly in the mule-cloth, safe from harm, among the warm trusses under the close, sloping roof : how little now he missed the open sky and the intricate canopy of trees.

Indeed, it was a providential harbour, this shed of Vasquez ; for now, as if to echo the disturbed feelings of the people, the weather began to express broken and unnatural moods. Snow and rain followed each other almost without intermission. Storms of sleet whipped through open doorways, rattled round corners of buildings, snatched long cloaks from cold hands. Whining with fury, the wind heaped the particles of ice against steps and door-posts, and then, suddenly swerving, swept them away again, clinking like glass upon the cobbled squares. When the wind dropped, a blackness of death descended, darkness covered the heavens even at noonday. Then the rain came again, falling like an ocean from the swollen sky. The waters of the Manzanares rose angrily, buffeting their shores ; lipping the banks, they flowed over completely, swamping the whole countryside. Each day fresh news came of the sufferings of the French troops, marching, in these conditions, across Spain. Their distress, their hardships, their deaths of hunger and fatigue, were heard of with pleasure, with awe and pride in the enormous retributive powers of Spanish skies. . . .

And yet, as if Vasquez's memories had been prophetic, the very next day Madrid was shaken to the kernel by startling news from Portugal. Incredible event, presaging who knows what disaster ?

Without warning, terrified only by the imminence of Napoleon, unable to endure the possibility of defeat, subjugation, impoverishment, the entire Royal Family of Braganza, together with members of the aristocracy, had fled from the Capital and were now on their way to Rio de Janeiro ; together with all their own and a good part of the public's money, besides jewels, gold and silver plate, religious relics and the costlier Church emblems, furniture from royal palaces, and nearly all the chief

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treasures of the city. Thirty-six vessels in all, of war and commerce, escorted by a large squadron of merchantmen engaged in the trade of Brazil, had accompanied the Royal fugitives ; whose departure, with all the riches of Portugal, in itself a gesture of defeat and of indifference, could not but strike the remainder with despair.

The people of Madrid pulled up, sobered and shocked. A convulsion that could uproot a dynasty founded in Time, and scatter it abroad like ashes on the wild shores of America, was dangerous as a neighbour.

"How foolish to fly from the Emperor Napoleon," said Vasquez, reasonably, under the new influence. "For us, we welcome the French armies that will relieve us from the thrall of the harlot and her hind." . . . In his business-like way he continued to add up the accounts.

Even as he did so a man rushed into the Posada. "Ferdinand is released!" he shrieked. "He is free, can you believe it! The proclamation of the Royal Pardon is just about to be made known in the city."

"Chk, chk!" said Vasquez, greatly moved. "Lucia," he yelled back into the kitchen, "see to everything!"

Everyone present, including Perroquet, rushed out into the calle, where at once they found themselves in a hastening stream. The people were shouting excitedly. It was soon quite evident that further progress was impossible. "The Prince is freed, thanks be to God!" cried a butcher piously, wiping his hands. "Though of course nobody knows why. Either he did it, or he didn't. He isn't cleared, only pardoned. The Duke of San Carlos is still a prisoner. Whoever is at the bottom of this volte-face, you may be sure it is caused by the duplicity of Emanuel Godoy!"

A man in a green jerkin leapt on the butcher's platform. "Godoy!" he cried. "Yes, I can tell you something." Seizing the leg of a sheep, he brandished it like an orator's staff, thrusting home his points. "I can tell you the truth. I tell you as a patriot of Spain. Last night"—the leg whirled through the air, pointing south—

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"last night I passed His Excellency's Palace. Or rather, the Palace of his Serene Highness. It was dark, very dark, no lights in the courtyard. But movement ! Bustle ! I stop, I hide, I look round. Mules were there, my friends, dozens of them, all loaded. José Laramendi tells me that *night after night*" (the leg rose and dipped incisively) "mules are there, all loaded ! Some take the direction of Cadiz, others march off on the road to Ferrol. Ah, my friends, do not tell me the reason. I know it already. A flight from the throne for the Bourbons, as in Portugal for the Braganzas. I know it. I have seen it coming. Oh, cowardly and despicable rulers, leaving us like the garbage in the gutter to be churned underfoot by the insolent Napoleon !" He raised the sheep's leg and hurled it to the ground in a paroxysm of rage and despair. As if something still lacked, he tore off his sombrero and dashed that after it into the mire. Then he jumped down.

A neighbour immediately raised his voice. "No, no, Sancho, you are mistaken. Now that Prince Ferdinand is released, all he has to do is to marry the Buonaparte princess. Why should he fly when that may be coming ? Let the others go, and gladly. Ferdinand has the Emperor's approval. I shouldn't wonder if he doesn't give him a good slab of Portugal as a wedding-present. Ha-ha, that would be fine, eh ? The rich Portuguese ! What do you say ? "

"I say, my good lunatic," cried an old priest on the right, "that Napoleon gives nothing except to himself. Cunning he is, and strong, like the wolf in the forest. Oh, Spain, poor lamb, thou wilt be torn in pieces ! "

"*Torn in pieces !*" yelled a man in the distance, thinking he echoed a threat against Godoy. The crowds took up the cry. The people returning from the Proclamation in the Puerto del Sol thought someone was being murdered. They shouted at the tops of their voices to enquire who, by whom, for what ? At the climax of the din a troop of police, with blows, charged the mob, making several arrests on the grounds of shouting in the streets, which

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had become a crime since that ordinance of the Queen, sprung from her jealousy of the acclamations for Ferdinand.

Perroguet slipped away as discreetly as possible. His mixed blood wavered between the three nations whose fortunes seemed so tragically entwined. But he felt still an onlooker, as if this turmoil could not touch the place where his inner self dwelt, lulled by rhymes.

He found Andrea shaken and silent. "I have seen Napoleon," he said. "I, alone of these. I tell you, none of the Bourbons will reign. Napoleon will pick up Spain like a walnut and toss it to somebody lower down the table—a niece, perhaps, a second cousin. It is nothing to you. But I am a Spaniard."

Indeed, for no apparent or sufficient cause, fresh troops continued to pour into Spain from the French borders. Gradually, day by day, they began to converge on the capital. "Already he is stretching out his hand," said Andrea, "soon he will close it." He passed his own hand round his neck in a nervous gesture, as if this closing in were already upon his own shoulders, like the metal collar of execution of criminals, waiting only for the Emperor to turn the screw.

Perroguet whistled. It was true. Paralysed, like flies in a web, the inhabitants of Madrid watched the advance of the French armies, the occupation of Barcelona, Pampeluna, San Sebastian. For them flight was impossible. How could they leave their homes, their livelihoods? With hatred and shame they listened, sheltering under their cloaks, to the rumours that raged up and down through every narrow calle and carrera. It was true, the Royal Family was going to desert! Murat had been ordered to march on Madrid, and they could not even stay and face him!

With black, furious looks officers strode about their quarters, twirling their dark moustachios. "For the sake of the honour of God, I'd stop them myself!" exclaimed a young lieutenant, ready to leap on his horse

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then and there, and hold up, single-handed, the royal suspects in their palace at Aranjuez. It was known that already five frigates were lying at Cadiz heavily laden with their belongings, prepared to transport themselves and the Prince of Peace to the safe, palmy shores of Mexico. . . .

Like claps of thunder over a valley, news followed on news, each more unexpected than the last. One morning Madrid was transfixed to find, posted in all the public squares, without warning, a proclamation by which Charles pledged himself not to leave Aranjuez. But hardly had they digested this, and considered its bearings, when, on the following day, came by courier the news that Charles had been caught in the very act of flight.

At midnight the first lady had been seen leaving the palace, leaning on the arm of an officer, and escorted by Hussars. So that was it ! The flight had commenced ! True, the maddened people of Aranjuez had effectually prevented any further escape ; with a rage and fury like that of wild animals they had surrounded the Palace. All night the tumult had persisted : in the morning they had flung off to the dwelling of the detested Godoy, and, bursting open the gates, wrecked, plundered and fired the mansion and all it contained, in wild outbursts of triumph and hatred.

At the entrance to the Posada del Progreso stood the messenger who brought this news, white with fatigue, beside his steaming horse.

Vasquez yelled to Manuel. Water was brought for the animal : with his own hand the host poured aguardiente for the rider. Hardly could he get out his words fast enough ; his mouth was clogged dry with excitement, weariness and dust. In a few seconds a crowd was around him.

“ And Godoy ? ” they shrieked. “ Was he butchered ? Was he hanged ? Was his head, without eyes, shown to the Queen on a pike ? ”

“ He has been deprived of all his offices. He is to be

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retired by order of the Government. He has no power any more."

"Yes, but was he torn to bits? Was his heart thrown to the dogs? Was his body hung in chains on the Prado? Devil and devil's son! Those black eyes of his should have felt my nails in them!—Oh, *Dios mios*, was he crucified over a flame?"

The horseman held his mount steady, his foot in the stirrup. With one swing, tired as he was, he rose to the saddle. Stooping, he tried the girth with one hand. It had been slackened for the drink and he pulled it up a hole.

"Godoy, the Prince of Peace, cannot be found," he said. He turned his horse and clattered furiously out of the yard.

Before the fire from his hoofs had died on the cobbles the crowd turned inwards, they looked at each other, and they uttered a sound: a sound like the hiss of a rising wind: the slow, deliberate breath indrawn into a hundred lusty and murderous throats. Then they opened their mouths and yelled. Joy, hate, revenge, deliverance, all were heard in that inhuman cry. With one movement, they turned and strove for the entrance to the court. . . . Vasquez, still with the bottle of wine in his hand, dodged back and gained his door. But Perroguet was swept away in the midst of the vortex, deafened with the shouts, oaths, curses, threats of vengeance, the howling of those transported into an ecstatic delirium by the deliverance of their enemy into their hands.

Gathering numbers and impetus at each step, snatching up weapons of every description, the mob surged onwards, sweeping through the narrow streets, pouring at last into the yard before the palace of the hated autocrat.

The house was barred, bolted, deserted. The blank green windows grinned derisively. The mob hung, silenced, in the ebb of indecision. Perroguet mopped his brow: into the slack of the movement he thrust, turning to escape. Scenes of bloodshed were loathsome to him. Before he could retreat, a man in front of him

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waved a big white hat he was a torero and beloved by the people. "The snake is hiding in his nest!" he cried, and gave a great bound forwards.

With one accord the mob burst like an avalanche upon the front of the house. In two minutes the door was smashed in, the rabble were in every room, screaming, roaring, thrusting their filthy hands and their pikes in every corner and crevice, overturning the tables and chairs, streaming from one compartment to another and back again. Through the patio they rushed to the kitchens, the bedrooms, the dining-halls. Everything was pulled down, broken, demolished. The waters of the fountain were stirred till they stank, their green waves rushed to the sides and splashed over into the court. Bodies of mosquitoes and dead mice came swimming to the surface. In a minute rough heads appeared on the balcony, sticks furiously struck the iron rails, even the stones and the walls. Every corner was ransacked. The pillows and mattresses were stabbed with swords and knives. The hangings were ripped till they fluttered in ribbons. But Emanuel Godoy was not discovered.

Baffled and sullen, the crowd surged out again. For a long time they stood, silently, looking at the house, now disembowelled, yet retaining its secret. In groups of twos and threes they began to collect apart.

Perroguet found himself with a big white hat in his hand, got he knew not how. At that moment a posse of civil guards ran round the corner. "Here, you! You led the assault!"

Perroguet wheeled swiftly and fled for his life. The populace, delighted to find an object for attack, rallied, turned upon the officials and belaboured them with ferocity, leaving them prostrate on the empty square.

Before the day was over, the house was stormed five or six times by the mob, unable to resign its hope of vengeance, unable to believe the absence of its prey. There was something savage and elemental in this deliberate and sustained fury, like an enraged boar ripping up, again and again, the dead body of its victim.

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They could not know that the Prince of Peace, wrapped in a mat, was hidden, not like a snake, but rather like a swallow, under the eaves of his house in Aranjuez. Nor that, even as, in the failing light of evening, they stormed for the last time his house in Madrid, the Generalissimo of Armies, the Grand Admiral of the Fleet, had already been discovered in his aerial retreat, and after suffering the extreme fury of the mob was even now lying mangled, broken, and bleeding, on a rubbish-heap in the stables of the barracks.

II

Perroquet, who was glad to have been spared the spectacle of the butchering of Godoy, realised, like everyone else in the capital, that it was the downfall of the old régime. The abdication of Charles on March 19th seemed a less historic and important event than would have seemed possible a few weeks ago. Even the accession of Prince Ferdinand, favourite of the people, creating in itself a joyous occasion, was shadowed by the eminence of mightier things. For on the twenty-third of the month, quite naturally, and indeed inevitably, the French army marched into Madrid.

Not as conquerors, of course. Just as valued and powerful guests. The whole city had received the most imperative orders to remain perfectly tranquil, and to treat the soldiers with the most liberal hospitality and kindness.

The Posada del Progreso was decked with evergreen, and Vasquez himself, dutiful citizen, stood at his door, ready to receive with welcome those who should be billeted upon him. Perroquet and Andrea, who had seen little of each other during the disturbances, went forth together to enjoy the exhilarating spectacle.

Exactly at midday the Prince Murat arrived at the high mud walls of Madrid. The bugles blew, the pennants floated, the gates opened : and the French commander, at the head of a gorgeous staff, made his formal entry into the doomed city. The brilliant sunshine of spring,

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clarified and intensified by the recollections of the late storms, flashed from the accoutrements of polished steel and silver, blazed upon the State uniforms—blue, gold and vermillion. The applause that broke from admiring lips thundered from the gates of Madrid to the slopes of the Guadaramas. Murat frowned: then smiled, then frowned again: Napoleon cared not for Generals who were too much applauded. Reining up, he hastened the approach of the cavalry and infantry that followed his Staff, transferring thus, to the French armies, the plaudits of the Spanish mob. Like a brilliant enamelled lizard of the rocks the cavalcade wound through the city: reaching its heart, it disbanded, turned, burrowed, and was lost in the houses, stables, and taverns, as a lizard is lost in a crevice of granite. Now dislodge it who can.

Perroquet was enchanted with the magnificent display. Dazzling the eyes and captivating the imagination of Spaniards, how much more it gratified one who remembered after all he was a Frenchman.

Colours, flashing lights, sharp commands, still filled his eyes and ears as he strolled among the pleased, excited crowds. They were glad to listen to him. Having come out of doors, and dressed in their best, it was pleasant to have more entertainment, instead of going home. Indeed, some of them never went home at all. The spring was advancing, the nights were warmer, and flushed with wine and uplifted with a sense of history they hung, singing and bawling, about the gates of the city all night.

And they were wise. The next day there was hardly room to move in the streets, certainly no chance to snatch a place of vantage. For there, at the city gates, amid the roar of cannon and the ringing of bells, on horseback, surrounded by the officers of his Court, was Ferdinand, the new king, arrived on this 24th of March, to enter his capital. The idol of the whole Spanish nation, he took by storm the hearts and voices of the people, exhausted though they were by the previous day's splendours: he

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rode into his kingdom on their hopes, and loves, and long-cherished and now-realised desires. Alas, the lizard had crept in beforehand. M. de Beauharnais, the French ambassador, and stepson of Napoleon, was noticeably absent among those who waited in the Palace to serve their addresses of devotion to the young King.

III

But this last incident, for once unknown to the public, raised no uneasiness. A time of national rejoicing seemed to have set in : and a rich harvest it produced for Perroguet and his friend. The streets, filled with soldiers, courtiers, merchants, were gay as in the old days of the greatest prosperity.

Dismay, therefore, was extreme in the much-tried city when, a few weeks later, it became known that Ferdinand had not, after all, been finally adjudged the King of Spain : that the all-powerful Napoleon had been pleased to withhold a definite consent : and that, to obtain this august approval, the headstrong youth was actually determined to leave his capital and seek the Emperor in person. That nothing but ill could come of this course, was the opinion of all. Lamentations arose on every side. Threats were made to detain him by force as they had threatened to detain his parents, now languishing as the Emperor's prisoners, in outer darkness.

The old priest who had long ago predicted Napoleon's rapacity was seen constantly on his knees before the holy images in the streets, imploring the Virgin and Saints to rescue the lamb (meaning Spain). Andrea said : " If the Throne goes, I go too." This was absurd, for everyone knew he would not, in any case, have spent the rest of his life in Madrid. Yet it was pathetic to see his staring eyes fixed on the young French soldiers as they strode about, already like conquerors, buying things for nothing, pursuing the young women, embracing their duennas, and pushing the ridiculous hunchback into the gutter.

" Do they rule us already, these chickens ? " asked Perroguet furiously, forgetting he was a Frenchman, as

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he helped Andrea to his feet, and reset out upon the tray his wares.

"Who knows?" returned Andrea bitterly. And it was true. Nobody knew who was king—Charles, Ferdinand, Murat, or the Emperor Napoleon. The Government, still having its seat in Madrid, still issuing its decrees in the name of the King, were forbidden to indicate by word or deed from whom they derived their authority.

Yet military tyranny entered their daily lives. The guard were quartered in the city and Vasquez had twenty cuirassiers billeted upon him, whose demands became daily more tyrannical and exacting. And when he lifted his eyes from their red faces, drinking his wine for which he would never be paid, it was only to encounter upon the heights which commanded Madrid and overhung his little hotel, the tents and fires of the invading army. Yes, Murat had command of the whole situation, and even Vasquez knew it.

Before very long news came that the infatuated and weak-minded Ferdinand had penetrated in search of the Emperor as far as Bayonne, that there he had been met with civility that encouraged his wildest hopes and those of his nobles; but that still no official recognition of his position was vouchsafed by Napoleon. In the meantime that august diplomat had sent for Charles and the ex-Queen—a little family reunion from which every person who heard of it prophesied a different outcome. Opinions, various as the clouds, and almost as transient, wafted through the city. Now everyone was looking towards Bayonne with doubt, hope and anxiety.

Not so Andrea. His mind was quite clear. He had finished buying all that he wanted of the local manufactures, he had even engaged a strong young Spaniard, Amorós, to carry his merchandise: and as he busied himself packing and arranging his goods, stopping every few minutes to stretch and rest his back, he waved his brown fist solemnly at Perroguet.

"What, he, who so firmly extracted the crown of France from the grasp of the aged Pontiff at the Coro-

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nation in Nôtre Dame—yes, my friend, you laughed at my recital then, but I tell you it was acutely true,—can he not now easily tickle the crown of Spain out of the hand of the imbecile Charles, at the same time withholding it from Ferdinand? Yes, the intentions of Napoleon to me, at least, are translucent. Alas, the Bourbons have left the Palace for ever.”

As if he was connected, by some invisible link, with the destinies of the Royal House of Spain, Andrea announced his intention of leaving the capital.

The very next day he set off, the faithful Amorós beside him. “I am going East,” he said, “through France, and away up into Germany. If I do well in Frankfurt I may return to my country, restored by then, perhaps, by some miraculous means, to her senses!” His face was haggard with the noble grief of a patriot. “Where do you go, Perroquet?”

“I think, West,” said Perroquet, his old desire stirring again in his mind.

Andrea shuffled in the top of his pack. “Here are some coplas for you,” he said, “and here is the book about the Courts of Love.”—Slyly he offered Perroquet a volume of rhymes. He fixed him with eyes from which all a patriot’s despair could not withhold the old, familiar, ecstatic twinkle. “But, of course, I forgot,” he added sombrely, “you wouldn’t need them.”

So Perroquet confessed. Somehow, it was a pleasure to do so. Somehow it was delightful to reveal how all this time Andrea had been deceived; Andrea, who knew everything. He recalled how often he had lied about it, how terribly he had feared disclosure, how he had clung to this invented attribute of his like a mother to a deformed child: and how at last, in the most dramatic manner possible, his secret had been exposed. He even opened his jerkin and showed the closely scored wads. . . .

To his mortification, Andrea, though interested, was not astonished. “I guessed there was something,” he said affably. “That day with the brigand, and lately,

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in the city brawls—no wonder your courage was so immaculate. I've felt for some time there must be a little protection. One merely wondered *what . . .*"

Perroguet could have killed him, he was so furious.

"Farewell, my friend," said Andrea, smiling; and leaned forward to embrace him.

Perroguet's anger melted in the instant. It was true, Andrea was really his only friend. With friends one could be merry, angry, or sad. Loneliness, at least, was not there.

Followed by his hireling, Andrea stumped out from the courtyard in the direction of the eastern gate of the city. At the corner of the wall he turned and shouted, "Farewell, my friend. We shall meet again." The sound of his stick was lost almost at once in the bustle of the streets.

IV

The bustle in the streets, accustomed as Perroguet was to it now, seemed to be increasing. No one paid any attention to a wandering minstrel. Vasquez was nervy and distract. He seemed to have forgotten that Perroguet still shared one of his stables with a donkey—not the ancient one, for that had been bought by a butcher long since—but with a hearty, well-fed, and bad-tempered animal belonging to a merchant from Cadiz. The merchant spent all day in the Calle Montera, and came back to the posada stroking his beard ever more gravely.

"What do you think is the latest?" he exclaimed bitterly one evening to the bewildered occupants. "All the Spanish princes residing in Madrid are now ordered by Napoleon to depart at once, tomorrow, for Bayonne! Every existing member of the Royal Family! The nobles and the gentry are expected to follow them. With whom, then, are we to continue the trade of this city? Or are we expected to relinquish that to the Bayonnese? Even the French glove-makers, the perruquiers, are tearing their hair, faced with ruin. What a calamity! The whole nation will feel it as a blow directed at their pride.

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Nor will they suffer it for a moment. They will storm the houses of government, rather! The Junta will be forced to yield at the sword's point——”

“ No, no, on the contrary, my friend, you are absolutely wrong. The Junta will undoubtedly refuse to authorise such an exodus. That is what will happen. And it is, at least, still the chief power in Madrid. Ha, ha, nothing can be done against *its* orders——”

Perroguet felt as if his head was whirling round. But Vasquez looked up involuntarily at the heights of Guadarama. Against the evening sky a hard black line was drawn, implacable and threatening, and beaded with camp-fires. None of the surface of the slope showed, only the indomitable outline; and in silence and without movement it breathed the sense of *Murat*, the half-god, the unconquerable general, the occult and irresistible power.

He shook his head and trembled in an access of prophetic fears. He locked up his house early, putting up the great bars, sweating and muttering. Perroguet, accustomed to sleeping in a stable without even a door, observed these elaborate precautions with wonder.

The next morning he was even more surprised to see the good innkeeper had taken down the green bush and the sign from the front of the tavern; the doors were still locked, there was a silence of the grave; but above, whitely, the family of Vasquez peered from the window.

From where he stood, at the entrance to his own stable, Perroguet could hear a hum coming from the city: a queer, trembling, high, and yet supported note, resembling the sustained echo from the plucked strings of a guitar. But it carried something which tantalised his nerves, as if it were the sound of an instrument which as yet he had never handled. It vibrated in the very gates of his mind. His blood stirred towards it. He glanced back into the shed. Within, he met instantly the contemptuous stare of the donkey, telling him at once, in its inimical manner, that he had not yet washed nor shaved: without, he saw only the precautions of property,

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and the white, pinched, early-morning faces of the Vasquezas. Some influence from the shuttered house made him turn abruptly and rummage through the straw for his cache in the wall. Here was the money he had earned during the winter. Certainly it was foolish to leave it there, open to theft. One quick flip and the wallet was neatly under his belt. To reach it he had had to pass to the donkey's other side. "Au revoir, old friend, we shall meet again," he said between emotion and an explicable excitement to his sleeping-companion. The donkey tried to bite him. "Peste!" he cried, springing away. A rent shrieked through his sleeve from shoulder to wrist.

What did it matter? Nothing mattered but that vibrant hum in the depths of the city. Led by his ears, he traversed rapidly the alleys and squares adjoining the posada. In the Calle de Principe, although it was so early, people were already assembled, calling to each other, shouting imprecations, and hurrying in one direction. In the Square of Cervantes a small man in a yellow coat had climbed to a balcony, to harangue, for a few moments, the shifting crowd. Before the Casa of the Inquisition, where so many had bled and been broken by the servants of God, the multitude poured, bearing forks, staves, axes, saws, weapons of death and torture, in a cause they felt equally sacred.

At last, in front of the Palace of the Queen of Etruria they massed, heap on heap. Into the Court of the Palace they scrambled, oozed, and squeezed themselves. There stood the Royal carriages, drawn up and ready, the horses harnessed with the ceremonial trappings, the Royal Arms of discredited Bourbon blazing in the morning sun; the coachmen, the footmen, the postilions, white with fear, standing at their places ready to leap into position. The first carriages were to receive the Queen of Etruria and all her suite, the following one the Infant Don Francisco. Surrounding the whole, formed up into three sides of a square, facing inwards, and heavily armed, stood officers and men of the French army.

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At the sight of these preparations, at this display of brutal and implacable force, a howl went up as a solid thing from the mob. Their feelings were outraged in the deepest and bitterest degree. Within a few seconds the tumult was indescribable. Bursting in from all sides through the military barrier, the crowds swarmed over the carriages, threw down the coachmen, smashing with their axes the doors, windows, panels, wheels, and letting loose the horses from the shafts. These immediately began plunging wildly, terrified, unable to get out, wounding themselves on the broken fragments of wood and metal. A young French officer of cavalry sprang forward, raising his arm to the bridle of the nearest, uttering a reassuring shout to the panic-stricken beast, already streaming with blood from a gash in the withers.

At the movement of this officer there was a sudden fall back: but the next instant a Spaniard leapt out from behind a coach and snatching a wooden bar directed a blow full upon him: the officer drew his sabre, but the extra horse encumbered him; he slipped: they both went down together.

It was enough. The first blow had been struck. As if by a signal the soldiers were attacked on all sides by the savage and infuriated mob. Musket-shots cracked out all round, adding to the uproar, the echo and flash seemed redoubled in the enclosed space. Again and again the first rows of peasants fell under the fire; those on their heels rushed in before the marksmen could reload. Bayonets were used, right, left, to hold up the onslaught, they stuck in the bodies and could not be dislodged. The entire square was a mass of forms, falling, rising, struggling, battling with weapons ill adapted to close quarters. All order had vanished, friend or foe were wounded indiscriminately: soon the chief desire of many was to hack their way through the accursed throng to a personal safety.

The young officer who had been knocked down quite in the beginning was on his feet again, shouting, trying to hold his men in discipline. The hat which had saved

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his life had fallen from his head, his bronze curls shone and tossed in the sunshine. Perroguet suddenly felt himself thrown aside savagely. An enormous peasant, armed with a reaping-hook, leapt into the centre of the square. With a single movement, he whirled the weapon horizontally, it struck just under the officer's ear, his head seemed to be sitting upon the blade as it swept far out to the side, flashing still ; the trunk stood up, tottering, spouting with blood, and then crashed and was hidden. The mob closed over the body, falling upon each other.

Outside, the bugles of Murat were spreading the news of the disturbance. Ere the mob before the Palace and in the city squares could disperse, nearly eighty thousand troops had entered Madrid by all the gates. Of these a large body immediately rushed to the Palace : like rabbits the insurgents were shot down on the very spot where an hour earlier they had indulged their frenzy. The big peasant who had killed the young officer lay on his back kicking and turning semicircles in the filth and blood on the cobbles for quite a long time, until the hoof of a galloping horse struck his forehead and quieted him for ever.

For now the French Cavalry were massing to parade through the streets, thinking by a display of invincibility to overcome the insurgents. Yet hardly had they formed when one in the first rank fell, pierced through the head by a musket-ball from behind a wall. On every side the inhabitants crouched, hidden, hurling missiles at the troops, shooting from windows, from alleys, from archways of houses. The clatter resounded almost as loudly as before.

The horsemen bore it unflinching, proudly, straight as pillars. They were awaiting their moment. The infantry were closing in behind the mob, harrying them as a dog harries sheep ; by this stratagem, collecting them in a cul-de-sac, a square from which, they barring the road, there was no outlet. . . . At last the signal was given : the cavalry turned, formed, and charged.

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Up and down, like machines, their sabres flashed into the dense masses of people : without mercy they were cut down : arms, trunks, faces, slashed and lopped away. Jammed, unable to move, the people now felt bitterly their defencelessness. Your very neighbour pushed you up against the sabre that struck off your ear. The dead could not fall, squeezed upright by the living. One thought was in all their minds : and suddenly someone uttered it in a wild shout : "Arms ! Munitions ! To the Arsenal ! "

At once the pressure gave way from the front. Through alleys, through houses, through courtyards, the mob oozed away on each side with the rapidity of water. As soon as they reached any open place they ran. The French cavalry were left plunging in the Prado amid the broken bodies of the fallen. Wheeling, they set to the pursuit of the fugitives.

Perroquet ran too. He got out of the square by the simple method of pushing against the first door in the wall and running through the building till he came out at the back to an open place. It was a narrow passage overhung by a balcony. The filth in it was nearly knee-deep. Among the rotting vegetables, entrails of rabbits, and unnameable refuse, he leant against the wall, pulling the air into his compressed lungs, hardly feeling the sabre cut in his shoulder, and thankful only to be alive. Away on the right he heard the cries of the mob gathering force once more as the new objective sprang before their eyes : on the left there was a sudden clatter and clink of steel, and at that instant two French soldiers appeared, charging down the passage towards him. Without a second to spare Perroquet threw up his arms, caught the overhanging buttress and swung himself up into the balcony, clear of the pursuit by a fraction. The foremost soldier let out a yell and bounded forwards : ploosh ! he glissaded full tilt on his back across the deep filth ; his companion, roaring an oath of fury, pulled up, and at the same moment a window above, in the house, from which Perroquet now became aware a continuous fusillade had been proceeding,

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opened sharply, and a small angry man leapt straight out from it upon the body of the intruder. Neither had much space to use his weapons but a loud triumphant cry from the Spaniard almost at once shattered the narrow air and went springing up the walls. A sharp call from within and close at hand echoed it. Perroguet turned just in time to see a dark lovely face, a hand on the mouth, opened in terror and surprise. Stranger as he was, torn, bleeding, and dripping with mire, his sudden apparition just there on the balcony must have seemed frightful. No time for thought, words, explanations! He sprang into the room that led from the balcony. It was a long and spacious apartment: at the end, the side that faced the street, every window was occupied by a little crowd of men busily firing into the square and picking off Napoleon's cuirassiers. Perroguet ran to a window and looked out. Below, officers were in the act of directing the onset of an organised attack upon the house from which their men had failed to return. A sergeant was rolling up, under cover, a small barrel of gunpowder, the fuse stuck out of his pocket.

"Run my head into a hornet's nest!" thought Perroguet wildly. What could he do? He was unarmed. Besides, he had no quarrel against the French, who were, in a sense, his countrymen. But he must get out of this. Nobody, except the girl, had taken any notice of him, and she had disappeared. There was a very small door across the room on the left. In a second he had rushed across and was tugging at it. No good. Tight stuck! Clearly hadn't been used for years. This wall was where the house joined its neighbour. Sweat was pouring from his brow. The wound on his shoulder, which had clotted, broke open with the angry workings of the muscles. He felt the trickle start down his arm again, and at the same instant he heard the excited voice of an officer from the square outside calling on the inmates to cease fire, to surrender themselves to military justice, or to prepare to be blown up. The only answer was a redoubled fusillade of shots from within. The pain in his arm was too great

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for Perroquet to pull any more on the door. In an access of fury he kicked it.

The door burst open, outwards, with a screaming of rent wood : it swung out suddenly over darkness, nothing : there was a sharp feeling for a second of being without heart or lungs, and Perroquet was precipitated headlong downwards.

He brought up with a bump. He had fallen about twenty feet. It was dark but he could just see. Vaguely, as if half conscious, he looked around. Lumpy shapes covered the whole of the surface where he was, showing pale and whitely rounded. Bales of something. He felt them with his hand. Not very soft, not very hard. Heaps of them, spread level. He drew his legs out from under him and stretched them gradually. No, they weren't broken. He would be able to crawl away. He raised his eyes. The four walls were without any opening. Half-way up, and presumably at street level, a closed iron shutter indicated the shute, and higher, out of reach, a chance crack admitted light. There was no way out.

At that moment a terrific concussion shook the universe. It banged on his head like a club : then shivered away. The whole edifice seemed to rock for a few moments : above his head was a sense of violent uproar ; but where he was the bales did not even shift their position, the darkness did not alter, the air was not stirred. He felt as if in a cell of some other world, cut off from all link with the living. Yet not quite : for a thin blue smoke began to seep through the chinks in the walls, curling down in spirals from the splinters of the door lost in the darkness overhead. Rat, rat, rat in a trap ! thought Perroquet, almost beside himself. A shriek of a tune entered his mind.

But this saved him. He looked down, and, sure enough, in the corner of the wall was the ventilator-drain, netted over to prevent the entrance of rats. How he rent the netting off, how he dislodged a stone at the side, how he tore at the rubble with his bleeding finger-nails, how at

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last he squeezed himself through that extremely small opening, only a desperate man can know. Each second he imagined the entire fabric of stones would break up, collapse, and settle upon him. He was almost bereft of thought when he found himself at last on his stomach in the gutter of a deserted alley ; but obeying some swift instinct he rose at once to his feet and set off at top speed away from the sense of his danger.

Lack of breath made him pull up. Not knowing where he was, he leant against a wall, giddy and panting. Noises from the world began to take meaning for him. To his extreme bewilderment, he recognised, not very far away, the sounds of the mob still attacking the Arsenal. Only a very short time had elapsed since he had heard that sound. He could hardly believe that. And they were no further advanced.

If the mob captured the Arsenal, the arms and munitions, what then ? More bloodshed, more murders, more ugliness and fury. An overwhelming desire to get away swept over him—to escape, to leave for ever this town, reeking with noise and hate.

A door opened just beside him. A child of two or three came out of a house carrying a large, empty mug. Its serious face, bent on its task, told of a daily mission that nothing could interrupt or prevent. Half-way across the street, towards the wine-shop, the child tripped over a piece of wooden débris, left from some scuffle earlier in the day. It tripped, it fell, the mug broke. The child sat down four-square on its tail in the middle of the cobbles and began to yell, its face scarlet, streaming with tears.

Something in this homeliness eased Perroguet. It made him smile, it was comic. It made him happy, too : he would give the child a few pesetas, that would calm him. Yes, yes, in a moment he would be all smiles.

Just as he was feeling in his wallet, a sudden furious clatter sounded farther up the calle. A small body of Lancers came sweeping down it, on their way to the relief of the Arsenal. The child was in the very midst of their route. With a laughing swagger, the leader lowered the

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point of his lance, performing that action of the Arabs who transfix wooden pegs, and shook his rein. Whether he would really have galloped on the child to spit him on the lance Perroguet did not stop to consider. He struck then, at that moment, his first blow in the Insurrection of Madrid. Darting from the side, he flung himself with all his strength upon the Lancer's horse : the horse plunged, reared, tripped finally upon the wooden beam, and fell. Horse, rider and assailant were in one instant a mass of struggling limbs ; the others swerved to the sides, and clattered on : Perroguet rose to his feet, but the rider, who was entangled with the reins, rolled over and over, writhing, the lance had entered his groin. The child, who was unhurt, continued to yell. Perroguet leant against the wall for the last time, and he was quietly sick.

After this, he had no more difficulties in reaching the city gates. Many were flying at his side. Some of these were pursued and cut down under his eyes. For him, nobody cared. He was neither a French soldier nor a Spanish insurgent : he was invisible. It was only by chance the events of May the Second had turned him out of Madrid.

At the first place where he could, he halted.

He was exceedingly tired, torn, dirty, weak from lack of food and loss of blood. But he still had, round his body, his music, under his jerkin his flute, and under his belt his wallet. And in his mind there reigned only gratitude for the release from this town with its nightmare changes of front ; its swift, unresting enthusiasms ; its splendours and triumphs of a day ; its inconsequent adventures which, thrilling at first, had left him only bewildered and exhausted.

Within a few days, when he was sufficiently recovered, he decided to continue to travel West.

He had not, however, entirely shaken off the thrall of political affairs. As he went through the country he

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found the people everywhere angry, suspicious and bitter. They had little time for him and his charming melodies. More than once he had to dip into his wallet for subsistence. The whole of the Spanish provinces were rippling in a state of rebellion, suppressed only through fear of Murat dominant at Madrid : but this could not hold them long. On the twenty-fourth of May the Asturias rose, followed by Galicia, and the kingdom of Leon. Soon the entire province of Andalusia was in arms, under General Castanos. The town of Seville, the provinces of Estramadura, Grenada, Carthagenia and Murcia joined the insurgents. In the streets of Valencia bloody battles were fought, the head of the Baron d'Albalat was carried round the town on a pike, four hundred French merchants were butchered at their own doors . . . In short, within eight weeks every province in Spain was in revolt.

"Yes, my friends," thundered the innkeeper in the tavern of Caceres, "everywhere you see the effects of the change brought about in the Spanish dynasty through the unexampled and atrocious perfidy of the Emperor of the French." He struck the table a shattering blow with his fist, so that the glasses jumped.

'What do I care?' thought Perroguet. 'It does not affect me. What is wrong with me? I was unhappy before in the dull loneliness of the country, and I was unhappy since in the endless, endless turmoil of the town. Neither in city nor solitude can I find peace. My unhappiness weighs upon me. Yet there is no cause for it. When Andrea is sad, troubled, despairing, there is a grand, splendid reason—the fall of the House of Bourbon, no less. A high, political motive that dignifies everything. For me there are only my puny rhymes that no one now even wants to hear. For me, only the cold roads, stretching for ever, the same stories, always repeated. Like the revolving horses at the fairs, the same tunes, the same circle, the same companions before and behind, only the faces of the houses different, the shape of the streets, the colour of the people's clothes.'

CHAPTER VI

I

THIS mood, like others, passed as Perroguet travelled westward, it sank, at least, beneath the surface, giving way to that other resolve that grew daily stronger. And ever, as he neared it, that remote village in the Galician wilds, never yet visited, though his birthplace, the feeling of its being there, waiting him, helped to relieve that sense of loneliness left by the recent political fireworks.

His progress was unavoidably slow. Although it was summer, the festas and fairs in these parts were few and far between ; the roads hot and hilly. And he felt, too, that time mattered not. Today, tomorrow, next month : he would get there when it was decreed. Sometimes he lay a whole week in one village before he could earn enough to pay for his simple food. The people were kindly and philosophical, they gave him what they could and hoped the saints would observe it.

But a sense of disturbance was still upon the air. However strongly Perroguet might dislike the whirlings of the political machine, however much his dissatisfied soul might sigh for he knew not what, it was of course quite impossible for him to avoid for long the sights and sounds of war.

Parties of soldiers continually crossed the country. Now it was French Hussars of the Imperial Guard, resplendent in their huge bearskins and green uniforms with white facings : now it was a Spanish regiment, the leaders magnificent, their followers in rags : behind them perhaps would come the French again, with a company of voltigeurs.

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Occasionally he joined the latter, sitting by the camp-fires close to the road's edge ; or marching alongside for a league or two in the summer sunshine. They had keen, bronzed faces, these warriors ; they spoke of *Gloire ! Victoire ! La France !* They were devoted and simple, glad when they had enough to eat and not too far to march. They did not care for his songs : campaigns were serious but they shared their rations with him when they had any. They never seemed to have any money. It amazed Perroguet to find such earnest and homely people the tool for death, destruction and heart-break.

Naturally, he kept such thoughts to himself. He listened to the soldiers' news, surprising enough in itself. For now, it seemed, it was no longer Ferdinand but Joseph, Napoleon's brother, who was the King of Spain ; he had made his formal entry into Madrid the week before. Truly Andrea was right in leaving the capital—that sight would have broken his heart. "But will the Spaniards endure this ?" cried Perroguet, remembering their volcanic emotions. "No," said a French corporal gravely, "naturally, they are wild with indignation. Also, they are powerless. That is why they have appealed to Britain for help. Yes, they'll soon be here, the English. *Pouf ! we can deal with them !*"

All the same, it was clear the affair at Baylen had caused dismay. The French forces had been defeated by the Spanish General Castanos ; the foolish Joseph had raised the siege of Saragossa just when it was about to fall into French hands. These were blunders : the soldiers spoke of them simply and with fatality, knowing that in the outcome, whatever happened, their lives would pay for them.

In a few hours they would pack up and be gone ; and Perroguet would be left to continue his journey alone.

Gradually the year turned. The last richness seemed squeezed out of the earth, the last glows pressed from the sun. This time last year he had met Andrea again—where was he now ? The season of vintage was at hand,

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the peasants assembled to dance on the grapes : it was a time for singing, carousing, making love. In all the villages there were fairs. Perroguet had not succeeded in acquiring another guitar to replace the one left in Vasquez's stable with the bad-tempered ass. 'When I get to Lisbon,' he thought, 'I'll buy one there. Little wonder my tunes seem thin—there's only the voice, or the flute. With voice *and* accompaniment everything sounds better.'

As if echoing his hope, the country, as he neared the Tagus, widened into fertile and romantic valleys : vines and olives shadowed the slopes with splendour of purple and silver. But behind them, the view to the north was black, and bounded by a threatening line of hills. Beyond those ridges, he wondered suddenly, lies what ?—Suddenly, for no reason, he trembled. He knew not how deeply his future lay behind those dark hills, whose shadows, already lengthening towards him in emerald and amethyst, would colour all his thoughts his life long.

That same evening he passed an encampment. Familiar it seemed, yet strange ; there were the usual accompaniments of a military company resting—stacked rifles, bivouac tents, pots cooking over fires : yet something not quite usual in their disposition, as well as their extraordinary apparel, caused Perroguet to advance in curiosity to where a sentry was standing : to bow politely : and to explain himself. Without difficulty the man gave him access to the field. Indeed, there was a crowd there already, men with goats and chickens, country-women with eggs and fowls. The evening light fell golden across the gay, ordered bustle of the scene.

This was the first time he had seen the English : he observed them with pleasure and interest. Light-hearted young lads they seemed for the most part ; appearing to regard the campaign on the Peninsula, for many their first taste of soldiering, rather as an outdoor excursion amid delightful weather and scenery. They whistled as they strode about bargaining for butter and eggs, arranging their sleeping-places. At a little distance lounged the

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officers, playing cards, smoking their pipes, asking each other whether they would be able, after all, to bring out hounds that winter.

Perroquet went up to the nearest group of men who, gathered round a small fire, were ladling a steaming stew from the cooking-pot into their tins. ‘At least, they eat well, these English,’ he thought, sniffing, the interest of a fellow-cook deeply stirred. He bowed charmingly, enquiring in the polyglot common to armies whether he might have the pleasure and the honour of entertaining them a little?

All the evening Perroquet sang to them. They were delighted with him. Finding the words incomprehensible did not trouble them, they joined in with tra-las of their own. He sang them all his favourites, one after the other, losing himself in the melodies, giving his heart, as always, to response and attention. One soldier, bringing out a fife, echoed and joined in the tunes. The hours passed, the stars came out, the night breeze rustled the branches and stirred the ashes of the fires now dying. The plaintive and human note of the soldier’s fife lingered on the long wandering melody, *La Dame Fidèle à Mort*.

Perroquet was entranced, happier than he had been for months. Such an audience, such a fusing of harmonious spirits, he had not known since he left Provence. Drunk at last with weariness and content, he slept like the soldiers, stretched out where he was by the camp-fire. Beyond, at the edge of the slope, the sentry passed and repassed, clicked and turned. . . .

All of a sudden, before, as it seemed, he had closed his eyes, he was aware of a terrific commotion broken out all round him. He sat up, stumbled to his feet, and looked forth amazed. The morning sky was grey, the trees black against it, and blacker than the trees and galloping towards them was a squadron of cuirassiers.

The English had been up in a second, had armed, and were defending themselves. As if in reversal of their peace-time moods, the French advanced shouting, huzza-

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ing, flinging snatches of some catch-word, as they dashed forward : the others with stolid, grave faces remained silent and unshaken. They lifted their muskets slowly, steadily. A volley of shots suddenly rang out : the first ranks of the oncoming horses fell : the rear ranks were thrown into confusion. So much Perroguet saw. An inextricable mêlée of struggling limbs followed. Without being able to prevent it, he found himself in the midst of this storm. Faces swelled and sank, sometimes close, sometimes suddenly removed. Fists, knees, heels, were uppermost in turn. Bayonets and sabres hacked and flashed. Someone at Perroguet's elbow let off his piece, its breath scorched his cheek as it rushed past. A man just behind him dropped. The face of a tall cavalryman was suddenly glaring into his, the eyes revolving in a frenzy, a sharp beam of light edging the swiftly descending sabre. In that instant Perroguet received a violent blow on the head that sent him spinning sideways ; the sabre came down, splitting the skin on his temple ; and just as he fell he saw the cavalryman lurch forward and fall also.

There was just time for this flash of thought, and one more. 'I have been killed after all, how absurd !' thought Perroguet : then darkness engulfed him.

II

His first consciousness brought, just in front of him, the back of a broad black hat, covered with coloured tassels, which jolted upon the air with a sort of regular motion. Below the hat was a short jacket under a blanket-cloak ; and below that again a glimpse of bright blue plush breeches. Every now and then the owner of the hat turned round, revealing a hardy, dirty, and cheerful face and a flash of pearl buttons as large as plates. He seemed quite inexplicable.

Perroguet felt extremely uncomfortable. He did not know where he was, but he did not want to continue to be there. He shifted, therefore, to remove himself. Instantly the black curtain descended again.

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When next he opened his eyes he was aware of another circumstance. His ears, as well as his eyes, had returned to him: and these gave him a long-drawn, continuous grinding and grating, a grating and grinding, as if all the rusty hinges in the world were screaming together at the same moment. Every now and then a piercing crescendo rose to heaven: it relaxed for a second and started working up again. At the same time, from the throat of the black-hatted man in front of him, burst a drawling song, a long, impassioned, nasal whine addressed to the Virgin Mary: "*A-a-a-a-a nossa sanctissima Senhora Maria-a-a-a-a!*"

That enlightened Perroguet. Somehow or other he had crossed the frontier. He was in Portugal. Also, he was in a cart.

'Why am I in a cart?' he wondered. He could now hear, between the excruciating creaking of the axles and the driver's fortissimo invocation, the jingle-jangle of the mules' bells, and the clops of their hoofs. But he could not move his head to see what else was in front or behind.

At midday the cart drew up to water the mules. The face of a soldier who in some long-distant time had played a pipe by a camp-fire rose mistily into view. A pannikin of soup was placed in his hands.

"My friend," began Perroguet in a shaky voice.

"My name's Douglas," said the soldier. "So you've come to!" His cheeks, lightly tanned, glowed with youth and vigour in the sun's rays. He grinned cheerfully over the edge of the cart.

"Duglus," said Perroguet. "Douglas," he said, making a tremendous effort, and collecting his wits and his little knowledge of English, "why am I in a cart?" He spread his hands in bewilderment and pointed at it.

"I chucked you there, my son," said Douglas. He made the action of chucking.

"But *why?*" asked Perroguet. Douglas shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, well," he said. There was a silence.

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"What was the result of the engagement?" enquired Perroguet with reverence, instinctively speaking in French when he spoke of war. He had to repeat it.

Douglas looked astonished. "Engagement? That? That was only a little skirmish. Just to give one an appetite for breakfast. The French drew off in a minute or two and then we cooked our rations and struck camp."

"And who struck *me*?" asked Perroguet, a little confused among the English expressions.

"I did, I believe, if you want to know. I knocked you clean over sideways. Well, you might have had a split skull. As it is, you came off with only a buffet, though a good one." As if he had already said too much he walked away.

Perroguet fell back. He gave it up. It was too difficult to understand. The muleteer cracked his whip, goaded his beasts, and started off again. With an ear-splitting shriek the axles took the air. The muleteer braced his throat. "A-a-a-a *nossa sanctissima-a-a-a* ——" He broke off to exchange an exceedingly ribald jest with another driver he had just caught sight of. . . .

But thinking it over gradually, Perroguet understood. He was still unable to rise from the cart, but when Douglas came that evening with food and water he caught him by the arm.

"Douglas, what made you save my life?"

"I have been wondering myself," said Douglas gravely. He paused, and then slowly continued: "Perhaps it was because last night the hills, the pines, and the water were like the glens in my home. And you sang, so very sweetly, the old Scottish airs of my native land."

"I sang them? I know them not, alas."

"There was one," said Douglas, "that is a very old Scottish song, it is sung by a lass who has lost her lover. *The bluidy sark I wrang for thee.* I have not heard it since Janet sang it . . ." He whistled an air softly. With amazement Perroguet recognised *La Dame Fidèle à Mort*.

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"And another one," said the young soldier, "that kept me awake all night, thinking of home.

*Would I were where Helen lies,
Day and night on me she cries.
Would I were where Helen lies,
On fair Kirconnell lea.*

Shall I see home again? Shall I see Janet ever more?" Tears came into his eyes. Without another word he fumbled in his breast and brought out a small portrait. It was the childish face of a Scottish girl in a plaid.

Astounded at this evidence of sentiment in one whose appearance denied it, Perroguet knew not what to say. Douglas saved him the trouble by turning on his heel, and not putting in any further appearance for the rest of the day.

The subject of Douglas continually occupied Perroguet. This saving of his life, a moment's action in the first place, but afterwards translated to a good deal of thoughtful care, deeply touched his imagination. With the eyes of a dog he followed his saviour. "Conceive it, I, having survived the unspeakable perils of a whole winter in Madrid, am suddenly, without warning, about to be cut down by a compatriot, only to be rescued by a stranger!" (He could hear Andrea's comment, very interesting, very curious.) He doubted if he could ever be sufficiently grateful.

But it turned his sympathies inevitably towards the British troops. In any case, he found he got on with them very well. Their gaiety, as of schoolboys on holiday, chimed a welcome relief after the strident affairs and the fiercely national outlook he had recently encountered.

Meanwhile he rapidly grew stronger. The sabre-cut on the side of his head, instead of gnawing through to the centre of his brain, as it once had seemed to do, appeared to draw itself together and retreat to the surface; there it smarted and stung every time he made a sharp movement: then after a while he ceased to feel it at

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all : until at last one day he discovered it was acutely irritable.

" That is good. It is healing well. The gap is quite joined over," said Douglas. " Yes, scratch it. Round the edges, of course. It helps to bring the blood."

Douglas, on his part, was proud of his protégé. He was pleased, when they sat round the fires in the evenings and Perroguet sang to them or played his flute, to hear his comrades say : " Ah, you did well to save the worthless life of this vagabond. He makes one gay. He makes one dance. Hi, Donald. Hooch ! " And indeed one or two of them would rise to their feet and dance wildly for a few minutes, kicking out their knees, twirling around, linking their arms, and uttering cries.

On Sundays, too, when the men relaxed beside some river-bank, some cleaning firelocks, some their accoutrement, some washing their feet or their linen, Perroguet piped his prettiest airs to these homely and pleasant employments, wishing only he could also lend music to the Divine Service that followed.

Was there any reason why this delightful life should not go on for ever ? Unfortunately, there was. For one thing, Perroguet could not continue in the cart. As it was, he was extremely lucky, as Douglas told him, to have escaped so long the eye of the Quartermaster. Besides, he was now quite strong. Yet he could hardly march in the ranks, or even alongside them ; they could not supply him with food indefinitely : he had, in short, no official link whatever with the British Army.

This problem seemed to have been troubling his friend also.

" The Chaplain," announced Douglas one evening, " is in need of a servant. He told Donald, who told me. What do you——"

" A servant ! I ? " said Perroguet, scarlet with indignation and surprise.

" One who can speak Spanish, Portuguese, French, understands English, can cook, has good manners, and is accustomed to travel." Here Douglas bowed low and

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gracefully in imitation of Perroguet's gesture, with which they were all already pretty familiar.

Perroguet whistled. He saw the advantages at once. Here was the very gateway to the continuance of the delightful life—the cheerfulness, the importance, the bustle, that filled for a time the unsatisfied places in his mind.

Just after they had reached Castello Branco, Perroguet presented himself to the Chaplain, resolved to be agreeable, and, if possible, engaged.

III

The Reverend Peter Granby was a very serious-looking gentleman. He received Perroguet in an upper chamber which he had hired in one of the best houses in the town, where he sat, very stiffly, with his hat still upon his head, before a table littered with papers, wafers, ink tankards and quills.

Two men lately from his presence had passed on the stairs, his thoughts were still occupied with their affairs, and not observing at once Perroguet's entry, he was more than a little disconcerted by the odd appearance of the new-comer, and his tremendous, deep-sweeping bow. However, he quickly rallied ; divined at once the object of his visit, and motioning him to remain standing, but uncovered, began to address him in a sonorous but not too intelligible mixture of English and French. He appeared to possess in the highest degree an orderly mind : having apparently, previous to the candidates' entries, made up a list of suitable questions to which he wrote the answers received, presumably for subsequent comparison and selection.

"Ahem!" he began, paper in one hand, quill in the other, fixing the new-comer with an intimidating stare : then looking down rapidly for the first items on his questionnaire : "Name : father's occupation : country of birth ?"

Perroguet was charmed. Nothing is pleasanter than to talk about one's self. With one of his swift, flashing

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smiles he gave his name : a few details. The Chaplain's quill moved over the paper. This was better still : to have one's words recorded is the due of fame . . . of Kings . . . Emperors. . . . He felt the thoughts rising in a full, pleasant tide.

" My name, sir, is Perroguet. My father was an artist. My mother was a beautiful Spanish girl whom he met once, and loved ever after. When he was young, it must be admitted he was rather wild ; he never listened to advice ; he drank often ; when he had any money he spent it furiously. His paintings, too, they were not classical ; he loved rather to paint feelings than objects. He did not make much money in Paris. Still, he had a little from my grandfather, and when he had married he decided to travel, and he went from one country to another, stopping where he liked and painting what he fancied, and living, as they say, from hand to mouth. I was born in Elvina, a little village in the north-western hills of Spain."

Mr. Granby had been left far behind in this recital, which had caused him some bewilderment : he now muttered, " Elvina, Spain," and looking more serious than ever, entered that upon his paper.

Perroguet, very happily, went on. " What took them so far north I never knew. I think he loved the peninsula of Betanzos and the sweet joining of the rivers Mandes and Lambre, and the twin blue curves of their two bays reaching out into the dark sea. Yes, the beauty of this, and the beauty of the women, and especially the beauty of the children. The houses, too, are clean and charming, my father used to say, and Ave Maria Santissimo is painted on every door."

Perroguet drew breath. Perhaps a little impolite to have mentioned the latter to the Chaplain—evidence of religious feelings differing from his own. But no doubt he would excuse it. Hurriedly he went on. " Yet in any case my father was at that time very happy, having come through the perception of feelings to the perception of objects, and was painting the fishing-sloops and the harbours filled with craft, and the sea-coast."

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Mr. Granby felt he had struck rock. "An artist. Indeed. Very precarious." Having delivered this, his sole comment on the joys and sorrows of artistic existence, he relaxed slightly, still with quill poised, to observe: "You, I imagine, are not one."

"No. My father was sad when he found I could not draw. But he encouraged me in my love for music, and with much care he began to teach me languages. Finally, while I was still young, he died, very poor."

Mr. Granby seemed pleased with the prophetic acumen of his earlier remark. He looked on Perroguet's saddened face with kindness. Hastily glancing down, he recollect ed the next question on his list. "Your mother?"

"Ah, yes, my mother is dead too: long ago, when I was a baby. Her sister, a peasant woman of Andalusia, cared for me till I could work."

"You have been brought up as a peasant, then?"

"Certainly. Only the necessity to rove still lingers in me. I go from place to place and I sing at fairs." A look of disapproval pinched Mr. Granby's lips; Perroguet noted it with alarm. "That, too, is very precarious," he remarked rapidly, with deference, adding the full weight of his most charming smile to his next words: "So you see now, sir, with what pleasure I shall engage myself to become your servant."

Mr. Granby stroked his chin. The fellow was unusual, an original. He looked at his paper again. "Per---" (no, he could not read it, the queer name). "Fellow," he said, "you seem to be a man of some education. In addition to your geographical attainments, have you a knowledge of Spanish and Portuguese? Can you brush clothes? Can you cook when required? Can you feed a horse? Can you be faithful? And can you promise, if engaged, to be always at my side as interpreter?"

To these mixed queries, of which he quickly understood the last was the most important, Perroguet contrived to give satisfactory answers: with the result that he found himself engaged, at four dollars a month, as

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servant to the Chaplain accompanying the British Forces in the Peninsula.

Whither this contract would lead him, and whether he would have cause to regret it before all was over, he did not stop to consider. A new and interesting life seemed about to flower before him: that was enough for the present.

C H A P T E R V I I

I

HIS duties, at least, were not heavy. Care of the Chaplain's horse amounted to very little, as the local ostler, mindful of his perquisites, always did all, and more, than was necessary : valeting Mr. Granby was a small affair : and cooking so far, there was none, as some kind host invariably received for dinner the learned English parson and his servant.

On these occasions Perroquet helped if he could with the dishes in the kitchen and stood behind his master's chair during the meal. Here with amazement he beheld for the first time the banquets of the leisured. At the house of the Lord Prelate, Provedor das Lizirias, Perroquet had his initiation into these mysteries. With his eyes bulging, he saw, heard, felt every detail of the pleasant, rare atmosphere.

First, there was the conversation, immoderately lengthy and formal, that disputed with the nicest courtesy the most intricate dissimilarities of theology : and the long pauses, in which the minds could almost be heard revolving ; succeeded, on Mr. Granby's part, by some sonorous and deeply considered observation ; which, in turn, his host honoured by silence before replying. Then the dinner ! Perroquet marvelled at the quantity of nourishment required for the need of the two ecclesiastics. First soup, in which limbs of rabbits and chickens floated : then a huge dish of bacon, with rice, raisins and garlic : then several kinds of stews and roasts of mutton and venison : then partridges, roast, with fowls, ducks, pigeons and doves : then fruits : then coffee. " Will you have wine, my dear sir," asked the Provedor, " or will you have some

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of this beautiful cold and clear water, which we are fortunate indeed to possess, it being in most places unobtainable?" The Chaplain had wine. With his earnest face beaming he descended on the curiosities he had observed upon his travels, at the same time listening with reverent attention to his host's explanations: while Perroguet discovered, as the evening advanced, that his services were ever less necessary, wine being as good an interpreter as any. When the meal was at last over, the servants fell on the remains. Perroguet saw clearly some of the advantages of service.

Before long it was apparent that whatever their discussions had been, host and guest were very well pleased with each other. The hour grew ever later, and just as his servant was yawning for the fifth time, Mr. Granby, his habitual solemnity overlaid by a gratified flush, announced his acceptance of an invitation to stay for the night. A little whirlwind at once fluttered through the house. The presses were opened, bars lifted, cupboard doors, squeaking, unlocked. Forth from their hiding-places came out the good towels and sheets; the very best pillow-cases tied with bows of blue and red ribbon were fitted on the bed; and more wonderful than all, and almost bringing tears to the eyes of the English Chaplain, there appeared the silver spoons and forks that had been hidden ever since the arrival in the country of the French.

Well, it was a charming evening, and Perroguet had slept for the first time on a flock mattress. But in the morning they must take their leave. With mutual expressions of regret the two Churchmen parted and once more the travellers set off, Mr. Granby riding, Perroguet on foot.

A suspicion he had begun to entertain about the Chaplain was now confirmed: the good man was writing a Journal. It was for this reason that he desired Perroguet ever at his elbow, this was why he observed with such keen pleasure any new phenomenon, muttering, as if rehearsing his periods, a running commentary on all he saw. With what delight, for instance, he noticed the windows of the

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houses, which, instead of bearing glass, were fitted with tin plates pierced with holes : or the bodegas, where wine was stored underground, and whose doors resembled tombstones : or the people who, shod with sabots, had already begun to thatch themselves for the winter, walking about under erections of straw like little roofs : or the fact that if refused admission to any house one only had to cry "Ave Maria Santissimo," and the door would be opened at once, in the belief that no evil-minded person would use this holy phrase : and with what professional regret he observed the many effigies of Christ bleeding and wounded, a painful sight indicating the proximity of a bishop's see.

"Fellow," said Mr. Granby (he never could get his name), "our late kind host, a gentleman, as one cannot fail to note, of extreme courtesy and learning, told me that ere long we shall pass a small monastery of great interest. So keep your eyes open, fellow, and let me know if you see any signs of its whereabouts. And remember," he added severely, "you are never to desert me."

This was a pleasant task for Perroquet, whose eyes were in any case being sharpened by association with his new master. Days passed, however, without revealing anything that resembled the object of their search. Their route, too, was prescribed—it was that taken by the army: they could not leave it to pursue their own interests over the countryside. Mr. Granby, disappointed and somewhat irritable, plied Perroquet tirelessly with questions, the latter finding, alas, the spontaneous invention of replies (in itself a delightful exercise) unwise if not impossible: for Mr. Granby, taking notes of all he said, correlated the information at the first opportunity, and reprimanded Perroquet severely for any inaccuracy.

Thus it was with joy and relief that he observed, one afternoon, when passing through a narrow and rocky defile, a small monastery perched in one of the deepest clefts of the hills. Even as they stood looking upon it from a distance, Mr. Granby winding up his thoughts for

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some profound delivery, a very poor Franciscan monk approached, begging them to honour his order by paying the monastery a visit. Hardly had he finished speaking when Mr. Granby, spurring his horse, was off towards the place.

"Yes, he is exceedingly curious, my master, and he has been looking for this for days," was all Perroguet could get out as he set off at top speed in his wake. His top speed, however, meant very little progress: the track was steep and strewn with rocks, and traversed with small rivulets which the horse and rider cleared at a bound, but which Perroguet could hardly negotiate. In short, he found it impossible to catch up; and in a rebellious and exasperated mood, not unmixed with a truant's pleasure, he sat down calmly instead, by the track side, and pulling out his bag containing some figs and chestnuts, he began to eat these, sharing them with the monk who presently came up.

"We are very poor," said the brother gratefully, "we have to exist entirely upon alms, we seldom eat meat. You, no doubt, with an English master, are well fed. The English always require much nourishment." Perroguet understood him with difficulty, yet sufficiently to cause his stomach, which still remembered with pleasure the ducks, the partridges, the bacon with garlic and raisins, to give a conscientious twinge. He emptied his sack into the brother's hands, wishing it were filled with better things.

Already he had begun to feel guilty at having deserted the Chaplain. ("Above all, you are never to desert me.") By now his master would have discovered his absence, would be feeling lost and bewildered, and would certainly never be able to understand one word of this monkish tongue. No doubt he would come back at once, very angry, and rightly so.

So Perroguet sat on his boulder staring up the road and expecting his master's return every moment. Nearly four hours had gone by, however, and the monk had long since left him, and his bones ached from inaction, and the

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stone grew colder as the whole cleft filled with mist and blue shadows and the sun touched only the topmost peaks, so that they rested like golden sugar-plums against the pale evening sky, before the Chaplain's hat at last came nodding into view behind the rocky bend. Perroguet stood up at once, waiting with bowed head for his deserved upbraiding.

"The whole country has been invaded," murmured Mr. Granby as soon as he came within earshot, "and ruled by the Saracens since the rape of the lovely and unaccommodating—(so-called) yes, lovely *but* unaccommodating Florinda, daughter of Count Julian. She is named hereabouts Cava, and that means wicked woman, yet wicked not so much, poor female, in resenting the beguilements of Roderigo, her seducer, as in calling in vengeance of such a terrible and lasting nature. Terrible and lasting nature. For Roderigo, of course, was slain; and not only that—"

Very quietly and unobtrusively Perroguet slipped into his place behind the descending minister. Evidently Mr. Granby had met someone up there in the fastnesses of the rocks who spoke English. . . .

This was the first of many excursions: Mr. Granby, wherever he went, insisted on visiting every one of the chapels, churches, convents, and the like of the vicinity. His energy was indefatigable. His pale serious face looked reverently at the effigies which for him could have no meaning: he never tired of marvelling at the tinsel and coloured stuffs in the churches and the walls shrouded in red velvet hangings and gold lace. For all this, Perroguet realised that in spite of his master's methodical investigations into his family history, he had always avoided with care any enquiry into his religious convictions or the state of his soul. One day, however, he received an unexpected shock.

They were in a cathedral, Mr. Granby peering with his usual interest at all objects: Perroguet translating inscriptions when required: but an officer joining them and conversing earnestly with the clergyman, Perroguet

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fell back and loitered in the aisles waiting till he should be needed again. He noticed, however, that both speakers glanced once or twice in his direction, after which they moved off, still conferring, into further spaces and were lost to view. In a short while Mr. Granby returned. He looked at Perroguet with what seemed to be a new light : his expression, always grave, was now charged with such a deadly seriousness that it was impossible not to see that something untoward was imminent : an impression that the Chaplain's first words confirmed.

"Fellow, I wish you to examine your heart and your conscience. You are honest, I believe : I hope you will be able to answer with truth and without reservation what is to be put to you. Fellow, follow me."

In much alarm, Perroguet wondered which of his crimes had come to light. Rapidly they passed before him. He had lain without permission in the wagon, he had eaten the army's food. . . . Was he, in this cathedral, to be obliged to confess, make restitution ? He had often been drunk, he had told—not perhaps exactly lies, but his tongue had run away with him, there was that quite fictitious story with which he had appeased Mr. Granby's antiquarian hunger, late one night, so that they could all go to sleep ; and oh, bon Dieu, there was also that affair, which he had hoped had now passed unnoticed—

Before they had gone many yards Mr. Granby turned again. His stern look chilled Perroguet to the marrow.

"You are, of course, a Papist ?"

"Yes, sir."

"A good one, I hope. That will make it easier for you. And for me."

More thoroughly alarmed than ever, Perroguet followed him. Surely the worst the Chaplain could do would be to dismiss him, that would be bad enough ; he was owed nearly a month's pay ; but, of course, if he were considered a delinquent he could not hope to get it. What a pity to be thrown out of the army, out of this serene, delightful life so soon, and all owing to his own senseless misdemeanours !

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Without a word, but with the solemnity of a judge, Mr. Granby led him through the building towards a dim, much-decorated shrine. Here he stopped. His pale face in that half-light looked more serious than ever : his blond hair turned the colour of wet straw.

"Fellow, you are intelligent. You are honest. You have, I think, some historical sense. You are, moreover, a Papist." He pointed towards the shrine's chief ornament, a life-size image of the Madonna. "Will you oblige me by discovering the interrelation of your feelings, the repercussions, in short, set up within your mind on beholding a presentment of the Virgin in a hooped skirt, a fan, a bouquet, and a full-bottomed wig?"

For a second there was a silence of stupefaction : then on the gust of his revulsion of feeling, exploding with a force he could neither anticipate nor control, Perroguet's head flung up in soul-easing laughter.

Mr. Granby whipped round, white to the lips. His wrath and amazement almost bereft him of words. "You dare to laugh," he whispered fiercely, "*in a cathedral?*"

Perroguet was sobered at once : but it was too late.

"I am ashamed of you!" said Mr. Granby. "What can you be thinking of? You dishonour us both. Religious views are one thing ; yours, I trust, are orthodox for your estate—but levity in a sacred edifice is abominable and intolerable!" He tushed and fumed all the way back to the camp. Alas, he was to witness much more than levity in sacred buildings before the campaign was over.

But Perroguet was extremely downcast. 'From one mistake to another,' he thought dismally ; 'the Chaplain is ashamed of me now. Why can I not consider before I act ? And why can he, too, not grant a little consideration to my action ?' To make it worse, each time he remembered the Chaplain's face as he had asked his question, his laughter rose again, succeeded instantly by gloomy feelings of guilt stronger than before.

In this mood he reached the camp, where to his surprise

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the first thing he heard was the sound of French voices, speaking loudly, without caution, in the midst of the busy scene. Rounding the trees that sheltered them, he came on a party of French soldiers sitting on the ground engaged in animated discussion. For a second bewilderment had him completely : then he understood. Of course ; the corps of French deserters, that acted for the army as guides.

At the sight of these men an exalted contempt swept over him. His own position, which at times had caused him uneasiness, now seemed much clearer. "At least I am not a deserter," he said proudly. He began to think of his master with affection.

That evening he related to him the episode of his life's saving by Douglas, confessing the sins of the cart and the food. But Mr. Granby made little of this, save to arrange that henceforth, whenever possible, his servant should have some time to spend in the company of his friend.

And this was easy, for Perroguet's duties were few : the Chaplain used him ever more as a talking-block, exercising on him, experimentally, the rich periods that would in the evening be duly inscribed in his diary, or written to his friends at home by the next packet. By this means a contact unusual between master and man was established, and many an intimate talk they enjoyed. On one point, however, Mr. Granby was adamant : beg as he might, Perroguet was never allowed to enliven the Sunday services by accompanying the Psalms on a flute or guitar.

II

Meanwhile, the whole army was moving continually northwards. Leaving Villa Formosa on the thirteenth of November, they entered one noontide a high, fortified, romantic town, Ciudad Roderigo. The gates that had withstood so many onslaughts from Saracen and Moor bowed to receive the friendly entering army. Within, the town was large and busy, the market was crowded with people, and crammed with stalls of French toys, jewellery, hardware, and felt hats. The sight of these recalled

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Andrea sharply; what would he think to find him in that gallèrè? But Mr. Granby did not give much leisure for reflections. He did an enormous amount of market-ing, bargaining over each article with grave pertinacity: Perroguet interpreter as usual. It was pleasant to be in a town again, especially a strange one, and to note the different appearances of the houses and the people. There were very few women in the streets, and those only of the lower orders. Highly-born ladies considered it criminal, apparently, or at least injudicious, to take exercise. Perroguet noticed, however, that they ex-hibited themselves, with fan and mantilla, pretty freely at the open windows and balconies of the larger houses: he thought, too, that the good Mr. Granby was not totally unaware of their presences.

Before they had been there a couple of days a note or two had been carried between the Chaplain's servant and another's: it was therefore without surprise that Perroguet heard him thus:

"Ahem!" said Mr. Granby, coughing a little con-sciously, "attend, fellow. Tonight I repair, by invita-tion, to the house of a Spanish gentleman who has ex-tended me that courtesy. You will, of course, accom-pany me. This time, however, you will stay in the kitchen unless you should be sent for, which I think is not unlikely."

Perroguet, of course, was enchanted.

They were rich, these people of Ciudad Roderigo. They had a large house and five servants, and a kitchen about twenty metres in length, with two cones in the centre for chimneys. The staff were all shouting at the tops of their voices when Perroguet entered.

"It is the General Castanos who is *here!*!" yelled the kitchen-lad, brandishing a soup-ladle with whose greasy edge he was drawing a rapid map upon the table.

The cook wrenched the ladle from his hand, banged him on the head with it, and proceeded to stir the soup; a young girl in a brown cloth dress with a brightly coloured border, laughing merrily at this riposte, seized a pitcher

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of water and flung it abroad on the table, thus washing out the lad's map, but at the same time sweeping to the floor a handful of chopped onions, which were waiting for the soup. "Daughter of Satan," cried the cook, "scrape up the onions immediately! Here, here—why, they are all over the floor." He bent down, scraping up as many as he could with the ladle. Every time the kitchen-lad came near him he struck him a blow with it, feeling that ultimately he had been responsible. At last the girl threw her arms round the cook. "Do not be angry with us, Camillo, it was only our game"; she buried her curls in his beard.

The whole of this charming scene had passed before they noticed the entrance of Perroguet. They all looked up with interest. The onions were forgotten.

"You come from the war? You have seen the great General Castanos?"

Perroguet declined knowledge. "I have seen others, however," he replied politely, "the——"

At this moment the awful voice of the major-domo was heard without, demanding the instant production of the soup. All hands at once fell to work, Perroguet assisting as well as he could.

The dinner was neither long nor heavy, and quite soon it was over. They all sat down to the table to feast on the broken meats. "You have, I hope, your guitar ready," said the cook lovingly to the serving-girl; "it will be needed, you may be certain. Ah, that beautiful aria, 'A sus pies, Signora'"—with his mouth full of beans and gravy he began to hum an air. The girl took it up in a clear treble; the kitchen-lad, who could do nothing else, thumped on the table with his wooden mug; and Perroguet began to fumble for his flute. If there was to be a chorus he would certainly be in it. Before, however, this could be properly launched, and while the cook paused to remind them that after all, perhaps, one should eat first, as food soon spoilt, a high pleasant voice was heard in the distance giving some command: and the next moment the major-domo appeared at the kitchen door transferring

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the message. The lady had ordered the presence of Lucia, the company were now ready for music, and the stranger's servant was to come too, the lady had heard of his talent. In a stern, valedictory manner the major-domo delivered this. Perhaps his own lack of talent had soured him.

The cook gave Lucia a parting pat, she tidied her hair and departed gravely. Perroguet followed, intensely interested but also a little uneasy. An audience was a thing he loved, but one of his own choosing.

The room they entered was very large and warm, though dimly lit. A red flowered carpet covered a part of the floor, gleaming where the rays from the charcoal brazier lighted it. The windows were high, dirty, and without curtains. There were no ornaments save two green china vases, and an exquisite image of the Madonna in ivory and coloured clays : and no furniture but one table bearing a lamp, and some dark heavy chairs in red damask.

At the farther end, and nearest the brazier, sat a group of officers ; the Chaplain, flushed and benevolent, was in the centre, and at his side sat the host—a proud, sallow, aristocratic gentleman of the old order, who resembled nothing so much as the battlemented walls of his own city. Moving about among them and filling their cups with black coffee from the urn on the table was his daughter. From head to foot she was dressed in black ; her long and tightly fitting garment gave her the slenderness of a young pine-tree seen against a lighter sky, while the black laces that fretted from it lent a little of the wind in its boughs. She possessed, this girl, that inspired and yet controlled elegance found only in very ancient families whose daughters have both languor and character ; for while her body was proudly upright, her eyes were dark as the soft shadows of forests on the pale moonlight of her face.

She made a quiet sign to Lucia.

Without a word Lucia advanced to the centre of the room, seated herself on the floor, and striking her guitar began to sing. It was a country song, full of echoes ; it

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told of the wine-harvest and the olive-harvest and of the pleasure of coming home in the dusk, and of knowing the vats and the garners would soon be filled. When it was done, without further order she sang again. This time the notes were bolder, they vibrated longer and more clearly : it was the voice of a soldier hearing the bugles that call him to battle. A man's song. It raised an echoing beat in the soldiers' minds that heard it. When the last notes ended Lucia rose, gave her duty, and slipped away as quietly as she had come.

The men leant forward in their chairs and began to talk with animation.

" Let us but once be given our chance, sir ! " cried a handsome young English Captain of Dragoons. The lamplight glinted on his face that was eager and excited, and on his blue uniform with its scarlet facings and silver braid. A brilliant cock-bird he looked, in full plumage. Beside him on the floor rested his high black leather helmet.

Snatches of conversation drifted. The talkers were in complete accord. How rosy the future appeared ! The formidable Castanos, with his gallant Spanish troops, would soon demolish, without difficulty, the armies opposed to him : let him only face them once squarely in battle ; the French would learn for ever the power of his arm ! While the English, of course, would only find it necessary to penetrate a little farther into the interior to complete the rout, before returning, perhaps through this very town, on their way south to the celebrations in Lisbon and Madrid ! . . . Hints of romantic reunion flashed in the eye of the young dragoon.

Perroquet had already decided what should be his song's choice : he waited now, his flute ready, his smile on his lips. Absorbed in themselves, nobody seemed to notice his presence as he leant by the wall, near the door, in the shadows. The little circle of light illumined only those who sat near it : them it cast into a special brilliance, glittering between the rich darkness of reds and blues and the dazzling points thrown up by polished metal.

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A single slim figure sat this side of the lamp ; the dark, elegant head was outlined against its glow. The host leant forward and addressed a request to it.

Taking her little guitar, the Señorita sang, gently ; her voice charged with a soft and plaintive melody. She turned to the young officer whose eyes had not left her.

*"Return again, brave soldier, when the wars, the wars
are over :
Return, return again ! "*

The charcoal sank, chinking, in the brazier, the embers reddened, heightening the glow on wall and cheek, forming a quiet yet passionate echo for the soft notes swelling through the darkening room.

In his corner, the Chaplain sat, sunk in a sort of reverent adoration for her to whom so many hearts had been lost. He was dumb, he was silent where beauty was, he feared it, almost, yet he felt its power. But the young officer's blood stirred, he stretched his long legs restlessly in the firelight, a glint of desire and the wished feeling of a conqueror shone in his eye. . . .

Very late they rose to leave.

The moon had set, the sky was illumined with a faint silvery haze. With noise, with thanks, kind speeches, God-speeds, they parted from their host. Mr. Granby's horse was brought from the stable ; he seemed a long time mounting it. Perroquet went back into the kitchen to say good-bye to the cook and the lad, and to thank the serving-girl Lucia for her pretty song. The kitchen was deserted and shut up. Even the haughty major-domo was invisible.

But turning at the corner of the patio he saw outlined against the sky the tall fair head of that young Captain of Dragoons bending closely over the pale oval upturned to him under the stars. *Return, return again !*

CHAPTER VIII

I

IT was all very well for the Chaplain and Perroguet to visit churches and chapels, and kindly Spanish houses : the rest of their comrades had a different fortune.

Skirmishes with the enemy were continuous ; at each engagement men were killed and wounded. They buried their dead and marched on. From each town and village where they halted more refugees joined the army ; this ragged and hunger-driven tail becoming ever more of a problem and a danger.

Some difference, too, in the general mental atmosphere became daily more manifest. The men's faces looked changed—darker, more stubborn. ‘ Ah, fine and careless a soldier’s life when nothing threatens,’ thought Perroguet dubiously, ‘ how sternly different in war ! ’ He began to wonder, for the first time seriously, what he had let himself in for, throwing in his lot with the troops. Affection for Douglas, interest in Mr. Granby, and a pleasure in motion kept for the moment the dark intruding doubts from his mind. Besides, the journey suited him, he could not grumble. He had his food without the trouble of working for it, as well as the pay his master gave him.

Nevertheless, their discomforts became increasingly obtrusive. As they continued north, and the cold became more severe, Perroguet began to wish he had a straw thatch like the peasants. And the peasants, too, seemed altogether different. Wherever they passed now the inhabitants seemed surly and inhospitable. This was, no doubt, the result of the French passage, of which evidences were now seen everywhere—crosses and statues at roadsides thrown to the ground, houses gutted, stair-

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cases and window-frames broken up for fuel, and within the houses crockery and glass in fragments all over the floors.

The frost was bitter at night, yet by day, when the sun shone, it burnt them. Yet they advanced ever, without rest, halting only for a short time during the darkness. And even this progression began to lose its orderliness and to assume a fantastic form. Marches were ordered, counter-ordered, not commenced till noon, not finished till midnight. This led to unspeakable confusion. It was impossible to find the billets in the darkness, and when found, the inhabitants would not open their doors, preferring to pretend to believe the invading troops to be French, and thus to rest undisturbed with a good conscience.

A queer sight the dark streets of wayside hamlets presented on a wet night, lashed with rain and thronged with the trappings of an army—wagons, horses, cattle, baggage, bullock-carts, soldiers and refugees. Now and again the light of a resin-torch passed quickly by, or a roadside fire fed by a broken wagon flared up suddenly, lighting the scene of confusion and tumult. With this, the distant clatter of muskets, the monotonous searching calls of bugles, the cries of women praying to the Virgin, and the curses of men belabouring exhausted animals, filled the night with the sad knowledge of war. Denied shelter, the soldiers would set to to improvise encampments, and soon glowing bivouac fires would add their own wildness to the scene. Within a few hours the drum would beat again to arms.

Perroquet could not understand this ceaseless journeying. "Why do we continue thus?" he asked his master one evening in desperation.

"My fellow," said Mr. Granby solemnly, "the French are behind us. More, they are all round, even before us. We are in God's hands. But God will defend the right. The brave Spanish General, Castanos, and our own Commander, Sir John Moore, cannot fail to be successful in their attempt to assist the independence of a noble

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country." (Noble country! he seemed to be noting in his mind.) Suddenly his eyes flashed. Something not intended for his journal broke from his lips. "Ah, the idle, worthless, ignorant country! Wrapped to the eyes in their cloaks, what do they think of? Nothing but eating, drinking and sleeping, and talking of how, one day, they will demolish Napoleon. Indolent, coarse, bragging, and without discipline! Have I not myself seen officer and man exchanging jests, roaring with laughter, and smoking the same cigar turn about? Yes, the army is concerned chiefly in admiring their own uniforms, defying the enemy from a distance, placing their faith in General Castanos and predicting the restoration of their beloved Ferdinand. No, don't speak to me, fellow, I feel put out."

Somewhat aghast at this outburst, to which his own interpretations had naturally contributed, Perroguet recollects that the Chaplain, refused admission at every door, had spent the last two nights on the hillside wrapped only in his cloak and drenched to the skin, and was probably now in severe pain from his stiffened joints. But while he was still trying to grasp the real nature of the military situation, and at the same time wondering whether in this town, too, the evening would repeat the former nights' discomforts, he became aware of a commotion taking place in the centre of the town-square which they were at that moment approaching.

"Ha!" said Mr. Granby, with a grim satisfaction, "what is all this going on *now?*"

In the last rays of the afternoon sunshine groups detached themselves from the general crowd. A number of Portuguese officers, with their bright cloaks, tassels, wide hats and silver filigree buttons as large as plums, were easily distinguishable: beside these were a few English officers and men, and surrounding them all, a large crowd of Spaniards. No one could fail to note the angry and contemptuous expressions of the latter, directed upon the English. Mr. Granby appeared alarmed, though not for his own safety. The hubbub rose to a

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deafening crescendo, voices were raised, fists clenched, looks of hatred flashed. Suddenly Perroquet noticed that between them all, on stretchers now resting on the ground, a few stiff, covered forms were lying.

At this moment a young English colonel, obtaining a hearing in a momentary pause, and raising his hand to command silence, began addressing them all, angrily, in good Spanish.

"What! You take our arms, our blood, our skill, our courage, to defend your infernal country! We leave our homes and all we have, we come hundreds of miles to this barren and miserable moor! We fall, we die, in your battles that you should have fought! This boy was a plough-boy near my home. I knew him well. He sang every day as he followed the plough across the furrows of Dorset. He knew every lark's nest for miles around. He might have lived, and been happy, and had children. Now he is dead. He has given his life that your land and your furrows may be safe, and your children. This other man was a fisherman. The rest I know not. But they have all died in your cause. You accept our lives and you refuse us burial!"

Words failed him. The Spaniards turned in unconcern from his tirade. "You are heretics." Shrug.

The Portuguese officers tittered, twirling their moustachios. The Englishman nearly choked with fury and indignation. He turned to appeal to the Alcalde. "You, sir, as Mayor of this town——"

The Alcalde signified with a mute gesture his inability to interfere. But the priests stood round silent, like hooded crows. What their final decision would be no one could know. Here was clearly an occasion for the Chaplain. Forget indignation. Forget aching limbs. Tact, reasonableness, and firmness: brother to brother-Church. Perroquet almost already heard the phrases rumbling which he would be obliged to translate. . . .

At that very moment, before anyone could intervene, a tremendous clatter swiftly approached along the narrow street behind the houses. A second later, a party of

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horsemen, galloping into the yard, announced the imminent arrival of Sir John Moore. Food, water, fodder, and shelter for a large number of officers, men, mules, and horses, would be immediately required and must be supplied forthwith.

The Alcalde hastened forward, stiff with importance. Here was something he *could* do. Some towns, he knew, refused assistance to the allies on the grounds of their heresy, on the grounds of this, that, or the other: but that was not his way: he was, was he not, an intelligent and far-sighted man. Reason, quite apart from religion, counselled the prudence of solicitude for the bodies of Spain's deliverers; at any rate while they were alive.

Before the Chaplain or Perroquet had time to retreat from the square there arrived the van of the hungry and exhausted bodyguard; followed immediately by Sir John Moore himself, already a figure stamped with tragedy, tired and stern on his black stallion. The young Colonel saluted, flushing, flattered at the encounter. The Portuguese officers drew back respectfully. Behind the General came his Aide-de-camp, his Secretary, his Assistant-Quartermaster-General, and his General Staff. No fewer than a hundred and forty mules and horses accompanied these officers, together with their servants, wagons, and bullock-carts, laden to the brim.

Before long the Alcalde was running about despairingly, wringing his hands, tearing his hair. Actually the little town was already as full of troops as it could hold: the General and the officers would have to be accommodated somewhere, but as for the animals!—they could just be tied up outside; if they perished, it was God's will. At this juncture some heathen of an Englishman suggested that the mules and horses should go in the quarters now occupied by the men.—“And the men?” asked the Alcalde witheringly.

“Well, there's a nice, large, empty Church.”

“Heretic and pagan!” exclaimed the Alcalde, regretting already his broad-mindedness. Still . . . he realised it would be extremely convenient. . . . The

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priests, however, would never forgive him. . . . Thus the poor man ran about, torn, wringing his hands.

But Mr. Granby was filled with delight and satisfaction. "See, fellow," he said, "here at last is our great English Commander. Now victory will not long be delayed. He and the great and gallant Castanos, twin stars in the hemisphere of—freedom?—courage and freedom, will soon shine triumphant over the dark forces of despotism and defeat."

He smiled benignly upon everybody. He had discovered that a billet would be provided for him after all, and happy in this knowledge only a caution provoked by the pain in his joints prevented him from engaging to dine that night with the officers.

No one but Perroguet seemed to remember the unburied English plough-boy who had died for Spain.

II

Four days later they heard of the calamitous and overwhelming defeat at Tuledo of Castanos

This was at the time when they joined up again with the Army.

For the day following the apparition of Sir John Moore, Mr. Granby had found himself unable to move from his bed. Perroguet was sent for, and with many moans, and also some fortitude, the Chaplain enquired of him whether he could add to the list of his accomplishments that of rubbing a sufferer with turpentine, oil, and spirits-of-wine.

This Perroguet was naturally delighted to do: in any case he was not at all sorry for an excuse to stay behind and rest for a day or so.

Constantly now he asked himself what possessed him to continue this uncomfortable and dangerous life. Looking back he could see how gradually he had been drawn into it, step by step. Always, at every point, there had been something that pushed him on. But now, well, surely now, having seen a little of the grimness of war,

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he would be wise to depart before it was too late, especially as there was nothing to prevent him!

"Thank you so much," said Mr. Granby, groaning as he turned over on to the other side. "You are a good fellow, fellow. That's one thing about you. I know you will never desert me."

Blushing at the turpitude of his own thoughts, Perroquet at once began to rub the good chaplain harder than ever. "When we have caught up with the Army once more," he reflected, "and it is possible for him to obtain another servant, perhaps, then, I may be able to go free."

Owing to these vigorous ministrations, and perhaps also to a natural dread of being overtaken by the French, Mr. Granby on the third day declared himself sufficiently recovered to continue the journey.

His horse was brought round, together with a mule which he had hired for his servant, desiring to make up the lost distance as rapidly as possible. Together they jogged off in the direction the troops had taken. All day they continued without rest; halted at night in a hut which for an extortionate price gave them shelter: rose at daybreak to pursue their course; and at last, just after midday, were able to perceive in the distance the dark clouds of dust which rolled in the wake of the refugees following the Army.

These, as a result, Mr. Granby supposed, of the recent regulations enjoining the natives either to fly into the mountains or seek safety with the forces, had enormously increased. They seemed an army themselves.

Crowded across the whole width of the road, the refugees straggled in disorder. Children, sick and lame people, old men, old women, mothers with babies, the whole families of peasants, with all their belongings on carts, advanced haphazard, accompanied by donkeys, dogs, fowls, pigs, sheep, turkeys, all grunting, cackling, bellowing, and adding to the noise and confusion. Laden heavily with their goods, driving before them their animals, the entire civil population seemed to be hastening in terror

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across the country. Many of them were drunk. They shouted, sang, fell, got up again. Cries of despair mingled with their broken ravings, with the screaming of tired and frightened children, with the lamentations of women. As the two riders came up, pushing their way with difficulty through the crowds, anxious and entreating faces were lifted, hands clutched their bridles with desperate force. "Take us up, for God's sake! The French are coming, we cannot go on, we shall fall into their hands! Take us up! Help me on to your horse, brave soldier! See, I am thin, I am old. I weigh little. Let me get up on to your mule!" From every quarter heart-rending cries arose as they passed.

How could one horse and one mule mount thousands? The Chaplain reined to one side as Perroquet drew near. "It is my duty," he said, looking extremely distressed, "to proceed with all speed to the troops whose spiritual welfare is in my hands. And tomorrow is Sunday." With this stiffening thought he thrust his horse through the rabble.

Just before him, two ladies, finely dressed, hand-in-hand, were walking in white satin shoes amidst the mire, looking lost. Beside them, in his work-stained rags, hobbled an old peasant wheeling a barrow: his old wife sat within it, she clasped to her breast his good velvet breeches, a sick hen, and the dress she was married in. Beyond these came a little band of nuns, their clear black and white already soiled with the dust of the crowd. Like flowers on a muddy pool shone their pale and delicate faces, that had known nothing outside their convent walls; they advanced as in a dream, behind the retreating armies: some of them, with the gentle seriousness of a child, were murmuring prayers, their unseeing eyes fixed on a crucifix, their fingers telling beads: others, abandoned to the strange and savage hour, were singing, shouting, dancing, flirting with the soldiers of the rear-guard, hoping by this means not to be left behind, if it came to the worst. Among the rest walked the monks, some with their heads bowed in an uncomprehending

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sorrow, some advancing jovially arm-in-arm with their mistresses. Fear was stamped on all these faces, both the laughing ones and those distorted in anxiety : the rags and the satins had one urge only, to escape an agonising death. In the midst of all moved the English bullocks destined for slaughter, and the mules laden with corn, wine and provisions, closely protected by bayonets from thievish and starving hands ; just ahead of them passed the wounded soldiers in carts, and the guard with their prisoners.

With a feeling he could scarcely comprehend Perroguet raised his flute. Into the air he blew a song of liberty and hope for these unhappy, innocent, and homeless sufferers. Listen ! the tune said to them : all is not lost, the future is still your own : the future spreads beyond, peaceful and bright ; come, sing with me, forgetting your miseries !—The crowd heard without interest, the meaning was too remote, the notes were lost in the cries and noises.

Gradually the two riders forced their way up to the front ranks of the refugee hordes. When they had passed these they came up with the artillery, lumbering heavily upon the broken road, the drivers looking with hatred and affection upon the magnificent pieces they were not allowed to use. Ahead of these, again, marched the main body of the men. The dust of their passage curled still upon the air. Between these two groups, in carts, or on horseback, dressed in fancy Hussar uniforms, and flaunting untroubled their gay, audacious glances, rode the unmarried ladies of the regiments.

The whole of this vast mass of people, animals, troops, ambulances, and baggage, conveyed the sense of an enormous body of living force crossing the country.

The two riders looked back. To the south, behind them all, the first columns of the pursuit could be seen. Banked with dark clouds, the sky itself lent them a sort of dominance : against it the French sabres shone with a distant lightning, flashing as the columns moved and turned. Like a huge shadow the pursuing army advanced

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steadily down the hillside and rolled across the plains. In a few hours the towns just left behind would be filled with new faces, voices, uniforms. . . .

It was long after nightfall when the Chaplain and Perroguet arrived at headquarters : where the first thing they heard of was the disastrous defeat at Tuleda.

CHAPTER IX

IT was clear this calamity had affected the spirits of everybody. It was also clear to the two late arrivals, that during their brief absence a new feeling had developed among the troops. A sense of urgency was now imparted to all their movements, combined with a reckless indifference born of their sufferings and the threat of a vague but inevitable disaster.

A hearty encounter with the enemy would have banished instantly these melancholy troubles: but any prospect of victorious combat, the soldier's only staff and spur, was denied them. The French patrols, harassing their outposts hourly, avoided battle: the English troops still were turned, advanced, retreated, as before, but now without rest, food or shelter. And after each indecisive action, the Spanish peasants prowled the field, killing the wounded with grunts and curses of satisfaction, robbing them of their few paltry possessions. When all were dead and all were robbed, they stalked among them slashing as a boy slashes at grasses: when light failed they kindled a great fire and shouted and sang around it all night. The leaping flames showed for a second, on the scarred hillside, the heaped quiet bodies of the fallen, the glint of belt or buckle, and behind them the ageless shadows slanting away. These sights filled the soldiers with hatred and despair. To make matters worse, the first snows had set in, the cold became severe, adding increasingly to their distress. Perplexed and embittered, the men now began to criticise their commanders, to slacken in discipline, and to take to pillage and destruction.

On Christmas Day, at four in the morning, the Generale

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sounded. In the darkness of that early dawn the army set off once more on its inglorious retreat. All that day and the next the rain fell without ceasing. Every house they passed that still showed Spanish inmates called forth abuse and bitterness from the troops. " You dare to remain here at home, not under arms, in comfort and safety, while we, who came hither to defend you, are without food and dying by scores ? " The peasants scurried within, black with fear. . . . " *Rats !*" yelled a man marching behind Perroguet. It was apt.

Confused between want, disappointment and hatred, the troops arrived at Benevente. Behind them the blue hills of Portugal still showed faintly, but ahead towered only the mountains of Gallicia, to the last limits of the horizon : dark and threatening they seemed to those who feared their path lay beyond them.

A wall surrounded the ancient city ; on the heights above it the French could be seen ; manœuvring, debating attack.

But it was not at the French armies that Perroguet looked now. for on the turn of the slope, after entering the city, he had caught sight of something whose beauty took his breath.

Above the waters of a slow winding river, reflecting now the last soft radiances of the sky, a Castle reared itself. Its battlements, high, lonely, and darkly grey against the evening gold, rose like a chord of music from the hills : the flowing yet intricate outline of the towers, and the gates, and the high mullions, melting together in one romantic harmony, trembled under a film of blue from the shadowed east : and this gentle colour, reflected, criss-crossed in ripples, throwing again the form of the Castle on the soft brilliance of the water. Coming on it thus, suddenly, out of the fierceness and misery of war, it seemed a phantasy painted on the air, the memory of a vision seen in some distant country of the mind, rather than any real edifice of stone.

Mr. Granby drew up. He was overwhelmed by something he could not grasp. He stared at that gracious

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and ancient dream. For no reason he could understand, between the Castle and the water floated the voice of the pale and lovely Señorita. ‘Return, return again !’—Alas, it was not for him—those words were not for him. He dashed a sad longing from his heart.

“Fellow,” he said to Perroguet, severely, “behold one of the most notable structures in Spain ! Five hundred years old : the dwelling of the Dukes of Ossuna ! Half-Moorish, you observe, half-Gothic, it reveals at once to the historical eye——”

But Perroguet did not hear him. Suddenly, as the Chaplain spoke, across the water had come a sound from the troops like the sound of the mob in the city of Madrid ; and mingled with it was the drum, beating to arms. . . .

Even while he and the Chaplain passed hurriedly from the Castle the troops were forming in position to receive an attack. Each man straightened his back, shouldered his musket, stood proudly at his post ; all discontent, all distresses were obliterated in the exhilarating promise of a clash of arms. Out from the gates of Benevente, so recently entered, the cavalry poured to meet at last the enemy.

But still the French tarried on the heights. Already their mood had changed. They feared, after all, to give battle. Not a shot was fired, not a soldier launched. Minute passed by minute ; the English stood motionless and prepared : hour passed by hour to find them in the same position. As the last darkness of night came on the French retired altogether from the hills.

Baffled, enraged, disappointed once more, fatigued, wet, starving, perishing with cold, the troops, lost to all sense save that of their own miseries, turned on their tracks, and staggering like drunks returned to the city. They ravaged the streets, searching for food or warmth. Nowhere was there enough.

Softly against the stars towered the Castle of Ossuna. Crowding along the banks of the river, the soldiers looked towards it. They here, it there ; the river between them.

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Their dark looks, their hungry and envious desires leapt the gap in a moment.

Like a dwelling in a fairy-tale the Castle drew itself up, trembled, aloof, ready to fly. The columns of porphyry and alabaster, the carved and the gilded panelling, the frieze of coloured porcelain that circled the walls, the ancient tapestries and pictures shivered, whispering together . . .

Suddenly, like a horde of locusts the soldiers were swarming into the palace, among the pillars, over the stairs, up the walls : within a few minutes they had transformed it into the wildest scene of frenzy and destruction.

The beautiful Duchess of Ycoinguyez was the first to be struck down. "Here's great-grandmother," cried a sergeant savagely, "will she burn?" The Duchess burned splendidly. The painted and oiled canvas of three hundred years, the heavily carved frame, hissed and crackled : black velvet and lace, long pointed hands holding a scarlet manual, blackened, crumbled, disappeared. A tall, very slender, gilded pillar with a carving of grapes and cupids in Florentine workmanship came down quite easily, at one blow. It lighted at once. More stubborn were the ancient couches, tables, and beds, their limbs parted with difficulty, groaning. They, too, were flung upon the flames, with all their tapestry and stuffing ; none thought that some would serve to lie upon. The fires were placed against the walls : this made them burn well, giving an extra reflected heat from the very beginning ; afterwards, when the wall caught, it would save the trouble of finding fuel.

A little warmed, the soldiers ransacked the palace for liquor and provisions. The cellars were not easy to empty, it was dark there and slippery. But scores of bottles were brought up, with kegs and barrels, sacks of flour, biscuits, meat, figs and raisins. Here, on the marble floors, amid grease and ashes, and on the flaming riches of centuries, they cooked their food.

Warmth, food, then sleep. With a shriek of tearing silk, heart-rending even above the babel, the tall curtains

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came down ; in huge dusty billows they sank, collapsing in soft balloons upon the floor : their satin underlinings of yellow and blue, their festoons of roses, their milk-white stags, still glowing from the background of mille-fleurs.

Many a soldier slept that night wrapped in the dreams of poets and kings : his wetness, his weariness, his muddied rags, his blood-stained feet, all were received in that embrace ; all were absorbed and consoled, with his disappointments, his bitterness, and his sad thoughts of home.

Early, too soon, before they were awake, the alarm was sounded. Torn from their happiness they rushed through the streets, oversetting women, children, and fugitives. The French were formed up once more on the opposite heights.—Ah, now, this time at last we shall meet them, defeat them, face to face !

No, again the French do not give battle. Yet there is an encounter. Just below where the bridges over the Ezla have been blown up, the river is forded by four squadrons of the Chasseurs of the Imperial Guard. Rejoicing in action, the English pickets and the Hussars rush to the riverside : the Chasseurs are attacked, surrounded, driven into the river, massacred, drowned. Their General, Lefevre-Desnouettes, Commander of the Imperial Guard of Cavalry, with seventy others, is captured, marched through the streets of Benevente and brought before Sir John Moore.

Heart-broken by this misfortune, which he knows will provoke for ever the displeasure of the Emperor, who has been watching from the heights, he is received by Sir John with courtesy and respect due to fallen greatness ; and presented, at last, as a gesture of nobility, and to replace his dropped sword, with a handsome Indian sabre. . . .

All this Perroguet heard and understood. Who shall say how news travels in camps and armies ? Have tents' walls ears, have trees and rocks eyes and tongues ? Certain it is that within a few hours the drummer-boys

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are telling their girls in the cafés and posadas what the Commander-in-Chief said to his Staff : and what is more surprising, it is not infrequently correct.

This action had at least one satisfactory result. The ardour of the pursuit was damped.

Yet this did not alleviate the distresses of the retreat. The road now became increasingly worse : it was scarcely possible to move the carts : men and officers alike strove to dig them out of the ruts ; and each day stores and ammunition had to be destroyed. In spite of the recent victory, everyone knew now that the Army was in shameful flight ; and that at the worst possible place, time, and country. Everyone blamed Sir John Moore and the bad arrangements. On reaching Astorga, where they received a reinforcement of five thousand men, it was discovered that they could not even remain together as there was not food for the lot. In the hope of dividing the pursuit, the French cavalry being ever on their heels, the English continued the retreat into Galicia, the Spanish moving towards Portugal. As for Perroquet, already he felt his fate was in some inexplicable way linked with the struggling armies ; at least, as long as his master should need him : this Galician prospect could only strengthen the conviction.

Nevertheless, from now onwards the sufferings of the whole forces were doubled. Mile after mile they struggled uphill, exposed without shelter to the gales, which now began to rage. Lacking sufficient food, their bodies could offer little resistance to the piercing blasts, and their poor clothing, when wet or frozen, clogged their movements, seeming to weigh like logs of iron on their backs. Sometimes all day the rain fell in torrents, so that they stumbled knee-deep in rivulets of melted snow and ice ; those who sank by the roadside were drowned by the rushing water as much as killed by the cold. . . .

Scenes that he would never forget stamped themselves on Perroquet's mind. A wayside village, plundered, streets littered with burst casks of wine, everything trampled underfoot, broken, or carried away, the revenge-

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ful feelings of the soldiers expressing themselves with drunken fury against the hated peasantry—the scream of a woman, the shriek of a pig or a turkey, the hoarse cries, soon stilled, of an old man. . . . The road, still crowded with refugees ; the weak and the aged, laden with their all, sinking in the freezing mire, beside their dying bullocks, from whose haunches the starving soldiers hack pieces before the rivers of muddied waters engulf them. . . . Caught in the icy flow an old woman screams for help : she sinks ; the whole column marches over her. . . . The quavering tones of an old man beseeching the soldiers continually for admission to their carts for his sick wife and family : “ I beg you, I implore you. Take up these helpless innocents. And for me, let me not be abandoned. My friend, my friend, can you not understand ? ” He runs beside one of the soldiers and clings to his arm. “ If I am left it is not the French who will slaughter me. The peasants behind fall on friend and foe alike, to plunder and kill. How would you like to lie one evening too weak to move, to see a dark group of peasants drawing ever nearer, stopping every now and then, to see their evil brows over which hangs the matted hair, to see their coarse hands ingrained with toil, to know that when they reach you one will hold back your head as if it were a sheep’s, while another cuts your throat from ear to ear ? Save us, save us from this : if you cannot, at least blow out our brains with your pistol ! ” For three days he torments them, growing gradually weaker. At last as many as can be accommodated are thrown into a wagon. Perroguet saw them all thrown out, dead of cold and hunger, a few days later. . . . The voice of Mr. Granby, grating with distress : “ Fellow, here is a Church in this village. I saw its spire from afar. Fellow, let us turn aside and enter, and pray for the souls of those who fall, and that God may mercifully help the people to endure their sufferings.” They enter the heavy dark door, the Chaplain uncovers, closing his eyes : they open to reveal an interior ravaged beyond description : altars torn down

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and polluted, sacred implements desecrated, graves exhumed, holy relics and limbs of saints thrown on the floor amid burst casks of wine, straw, filth, the rotting corpses of horses, and the naked and mutilated body of a woman. "God forgive us all," whispers Mr. Granby, trembling.

. . . And the last thing at night, lighting the scene of desolation, the big flares proclaiming where the artillery are burning their wagons, gesture of despair, shooting those horses unable to proceed, and throwing over the precipices stores and ammunition that cannot be taken on, yet must not be left for the enemy. . . .

With unspeakable relief Perroguet reached the night's billets. Here, the dreadful sights, the days of wretchedness and pain, rolled away for a brief space, becoming no more than a nightmare, that cannot hurt human life. Completely unaccustomed to these conditions of travel and warfare, his entire body ached, his whole spirit entreated a release from the tragic thrall. At the village of Bembibre, where he and the Chaplain arrived after eleven o'clock one night, he was so exhausted as to be quite unable to comprehend the orders he was receiving. A hovel was available for him, that was all he knew, his one conscious desire was to sleep, *sleep*. The clothes of Mr. Granby were crusted with mud, but brushing them was not thought of : their shoulders were covered with snuff, which the Chaplain now took every moment of the day : this, and lengthy though disjointed descantations on the historical background of the peasantry being his only refuge amid the sufferings he could not alleviate. His cultured rumblings pursued Perroguet even in slumber, mixed with snuff-coloured clouds, the old woman's cry, and the savage faces of the starving soldiers. At last it all sank away ; he was with Andrea ; lying under chestnut trees decked with full summer, listening to the birds and a running brook, and Andrea's pleasant voice relating some improbable history. . . .

All of a sudden he awoke. It was dawn, perhaps five o'clock. The time for the bugles to sound again for the march. His limbs still seemed glued to the ground, his

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senses unable to tackle the day's meaning. All at once, with a shock of surprise, he realised that around him was complete silence. Where was the shouting, the cursing, the stumbling confusion of men and animals rousing from sleep and preparing against their will to start the day? Staggering from his straw, he went to the door of the hovel and looked forth.

Silence, indeed. The moon shone brightly. Under its light nothing stirred. Not a soul was to be heard or seen. Not a sign of a soldier anywhere in the neighbourhood. Not any trace of mule, horse or baggage. Overwhelmed with bewilderment, he stepped out into the road. His footstep echoed with a hard frozen ring on the ground. He went to the door of the stable, where last night many of his comrades had been sleeping, and threw it open. The moonbeams sharply entered, cutting a white angle into the darkness and throwing up a misty radiance. It was empty. The door swung once or twice to and fro on its battered hinge, caught in the morning wind which was beginning to rise. From under the straw in the far corner a dog emerged, scratching and stretching itself. It came to the entrance and sniffed the air. It seemed to be the only inhabitant of the village.

For a long time Perroguet stood there, shivering in the intense cold, dazed, not knowing what to do. At last, in the distance, he saw an old man coming up from the valley to fill his bucket at the half-frozen stream. Perroguet hastened towards him. "Where are they, the troops, the army, everyone?"

On the man's quavering explanation, eked out by questions, Perroguet's scattered wits understood. The Generale had sounded at midnight, half an hour after he had fallen asleep. The whole of the troops had immediately advanced. What dire necessity could have forced this sudden and cruel awakening?

He could not think of them, though, the harassed and weary soldiers. His one thought was of joy, freedom and deliverance. He was liberated at last from this nightmare march! Now he could—he looked round at the

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deserted village, and beyond it to the barren slopes deep in snow and flanked by steep and rocky gorges. Could he exist here even for a day until he would be overtaken by the French? Somewhere from the houses a horse whinnied. It, too, had been forgotten. It, also, must have slept, still as a corpse.

This call changed his mood. He must, indeed, follow the Army. The Chaplain needed him. He was still his servant. Besides, what fate for him, and the horse too, if they fell into the hands of the pursuit? For it, a heavy burden till it fell in its tracks; for him, perhaps a sabre-cut as the Grenadiers swept past, perhaps a slow death of starvation in the snow.

He was no horseman, Perroguet, but he took the animal out of the stable, saddled it and mounted it and was soon urging it along the road. Alas, no need to ask which way the divisions went. The whole length of their track was strewn with the grim harvests of war.

For mile after mile the churned and dirtied snow was littered with the dark mounds of dead mules, horses, donkeys: with broken carts, boxes and cases: with guns and ammunition abandoned and destroyed: and among them, the bodies of men, of children, of priests, nuns, peasants, frozen stiff in their ragged clothing, their cheek-bones starting in starvation. Already their bodies had been torn, even in daylight, by the maddened wolves and the vultures of the mountains.

With difficulty Perroguet hastened his steed between these many obstacles. Muskets, dropped from numbed hands, lay at all angles, tripping him up: on every side sharp broken fragments and pieces of accoutrements emerged from the trampled snow. The whole day he urged the horse along this route, finding for the animal in the evening, in one of the abandoned carts, a little chopped chaff of thistles. This was its only nourishment. At last, on the outskirts of Villa Franca, he came up with the tail of the retreat.

Eagerly he addressed them. "Comrades, have you seen pass the English chaplain, Mr. Granby?"

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No words answered him. The men hardly noticed what he said. Only a few bitter, hungry, and covetous looks passed towards him. ‘Die: I can then have your coat,’ they seemed to say. ‘Fall, I can then mount your horse.’

But Perroquet pushed onwards. An obsession had taken hold of his mind. He followed the Army as if he were following Destiny. An invisible thread seemed to be dragging him across the mountains, over the roads heaped with the dying. All day he did not rest: he passed beside the troops, looking and asking for his master; at nightfall he sheltered for a few hours, and with the first dawn continued as before.

This day, in the middle of the morning, hail descended, large as nuts. The baggage-mules, hurt by the blows of the hailstones, ran squealing in the narrow paths. Their stampede, their cries, their kickings threw all into increased disorder, in the midst of which a Scottish voice was heard calling upon them, in the name of St. Andrew, to desist. At the same time many of the soldiers, battered by the furious cannonade, were attempting to mount their knapsacks as hats to protect at least their heads. Under the icy hammering of the pellets they struggled with their numbed hands to force buckles and stiffly frozen leather. Here they stood, cursing, shouting to each other amid the confusion. Perroquet was occupied in guarding his horse from fright, having no wish to be shied over the precipice; as he urged his mount towards the shelter of an overhanging rock he came on a young soldier standing still in the road, dazed with a sort of frozen despair. He bowed his head against the stinging blows from the hail; his hands were frostbitten, he could not use them. Struck by something he could not define, Perroquet hurried forward at once to help this man.

It was Douglas.

He was white to the eyes and terribly weak. He was hardly able to walk. Perroquet, who had instantly dismounted, pulled him out to the side, under the rocky shelter away from the column ever staggering onwards.

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Here, first, he embraced him. A friend, found, lost, and found again ! With many exclamations he expressed his delight, his surprise, his compassion. Then, with great difficulty—for Douglas was stiff and in much pain—he hoisted him on to the horse. Just before him was an officer walking on foot, like the men. Perroquet held the bridle and Douglas drooped over it. By and by he began to speak, in a low voice of no emotion. "An army of fifty thousand men is in pursuit," he said, "and already Junot, with fifteen thousand, is cutting off our retreat." This fact, isolated from the scene of horror and distress, and the sensation of his own miseries, seemed to be the only one retained in his mind. He looked up, opening his eyes, shaken to life as the horse stumbled. "But of course," he added, "we will win the war." This was his sole recognition of the appearance of his friend.

His was the only voice that spoke. There was a fearful silence in the ranks. Now that the swift storm of hail was over, there was no sound in the mountains but the groans of those lying down in the snow to die : and nothing around them but the bitter cold, the corpses of the fallen, and the huge unpitying hills. But Perroquet's heart was warmed with a bright inward flame ; he thought of the cart where Douglas had laid him, and of his kindly care ; he rejoiced to think his own hand now had returned ease, perhaps life.

All day they toiled up the Monte del Cebiero. All day the rain drenched their bodies, and the wind, following, froze them into pillars of ice : their clothes crackled as they stumbled onwards and thawed only where their tired bodies gave out heat. There was no fuel anywhere, nor food. Many had no longer any shoes ; the snow was stained with blood from their broken feet. During this day the last of the wounded, who had been dragged along either by hand in wagons, or clinging to the arms of their comrades, were finally abandoned. Their cries for pity, for mercy, were terrible. They were thrown aside into the snow, which quietly closed over them. Beside them, a few minutes later, sank perhaps their comrades.

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Against a steely sky the shimmering peak of Nogallis reared itself, a perpendicular mountain of ice, with a dark crack of road steeply ascending. Night came on before the summit was reached. As darkness fell the wind increased in speed, driving before it scurrying fleeces of snow. Gusts tore off hats and wrenched cloaks streaming behind : the weak were blown right over the precipice. To stop for a moment was to freeze : there was only to continue to wade through the snow in the blackness with bleeding and swollen feet over the bodies of men and horses.

All through this journey a carriage and four horses containing a lady, nurse, and child, family of an officer, followed about six miles in the rear.

As night advanced the troops could go no farther. They sank where they were, many never to rise again. In a fallen haversack Perroguet found some black bread soaked in fish-water ; this joyfully he gave to Douglas. After this he must have slept. A weight as of a Cathedral rested upon him : within it, Mr. Granby, dressed in the uniform of a French Marshal, was striding about, sneezing with snuff and demanding what had become of his servant. Perroguet tried to shout : 'Here I am !' His voice could make no sound ; the Cathedral sank deeper upon his chest ; he felt overwhelmed, crushed, about to be obliterated. . . . With a terrific effort he rolled his body away.

That woke him. Beside him, to the windward, a horse was lying, motionless, its back piled with particles of ice and snow. In the windless hollow just beneath, a little warmth from his body still lingered.

It was quite dark, a midnight without stars. The wind had dropped a little, its moaning hovered ghostly among the rocks : and through this sound came and went the last, unnoted, heart-wrenched phrases, the dear prayers and whispers of those now dying. A little murmur, shaking the freezing solitude of the night, a weak sudden voice, then silence. A loved name, breathed for the last time, into alien air. The quiet groan of a man, the

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sobbing of a boy. "Oh, mother, mother. Come to me. I want you. I repent: against your wishes I became a soldier. Give me your pardon, mother, and your blessing, before I die! . . . Mother, take me home. I am tired. . . . Oh, Janet, I shall never see thee more."

It was the voice of Douglas. The sound, floating already on the air, like a spirit, the words, surrendered without control, struck Perroguet's heart like a whip. He stumbled towards it in the darkness. He fell over bodies, he wrenched his limbs, he rose, he stumbled again. He cried aloud in the blackness in his agony: "Douglas, where are you? Let me help you. Douglas, wait, I am coming."

He heard it no more. It was silenced. He could not find him. And at last Perroguet sank to the ground, and hanging his head over his knees, he wept. Exhaustion, loneliness, despair.

In the morning, a few yards away, he saw his body, with that of the horse he had ridden. They were both stiff, rimed with frost, and glittering under the grey dawn.

The journey after this became indescribable. Perroguet could no longer see nor hear. Quite soon he would no longer feel. He had lost the toe of one foot from frostbite, but this gave him now no pain. He thought no more of Mr. Granby or his own affairs. He followed the blood-stained tracks in the snow without volition, pushed on only by those stumbling behind.

From time to time the pursuit of French cavalry caught them up, coming ever closer, harassing the rear-guard. The soldiers turned in their ranks trying to form squares. The fallen lifted themselves from the snow where their dying exhaustion had laid them. Leaning on one arm, raising their muskets with difficulty, they fired point-blank into the pursuit, their eyes too sightless to single out the enemy. The French wheeled, turned, and, plunging, retired. An alarm consumed them at the sight of these mad, fierce, indestructible Englishmen.

Under torrents of sleet they arrived at Lugo. Here, at

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last, they were to make a stand. The men were halted ; each was given sixty rounds of ammunition. The sick and the baggage, such as was left, went on to Corunna. After so much confusion and suffering the men were glad to turn to action, perhaps to victory. Now at last the English troops were no longer to present the spectacle of flight, but one of courage and defiance.

Perroguet watched from a slope the clash of arms at Lugo.

Steady, silent as death, stood the English troops. Grim, determined scowls shadowed their haggard eyes and their looks of weariness and hunger. The French advanced with cries, huzzas, the officers pricking their men on, and shouting words of France and Glory. Thus, amid tumult, they advanced ; but the line before them did not waver. All at once, this unflinching and motionless line to which they drew ever nearer seemed to appal them, to make them stupid : at the very points of the bayonets they turned to fly. Their officers shouted again and again, consumed with fury. One of them, in a bright green uniform with flashing white facings, stayed to the last, trying to keep his charger from following the flight. The horse leapt and plunged, maddened between his instinct and the spur.

Seeing him thus isolated, with none likely to attack him or to support him, or to vindicate his undoubted courage, a young English officer of Dragoons sprang forward on his charger. Together these two met, a mounted duel, equally opposed, as in the days of chivalry : the armies drew back, looking on in wonder and interest. The green uniform manœuvred proudly against blue, scarlet, and silver braid : in the bright sunshine the two young faces shone clearly. ‘Let us but have our chance, sir,’ the fair Dragoon seemed to be saying with his gay confidence. The sabres flashed once, twice. The next moment a shot cracked from the French ranks. The gay Dragoon fell from his horse, a ball in his heart. His charger, riderless, reins flapping, galloped back into the lines : the Frenchman wheeled and withdrew. Between

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them the bright figure lay motionless and alone, his arms stretched : a stain began to spread between them. (*Return, return again !*)

Perroquet could bear no more. He ran down the hill and flung himself face downwards on the ground, feeling more miserable than he had ever felt.

Yet nothing decisive came after all of that encounter. All day Sir John Moore stood against Soult : neither daring attack : all day rain fell, hopes dwindled, ardour and expectations alike were destroyed. When night fell, fires were lighted to deceive the enemy, and the last few hours' march to Corunna was begun.

The sight of the sea heartened everybody : but here, in the interminable list of disappointments, was another disappointment for the exhausted troops. The transports from Vigo had not arrived. The bay stretched empty and clear, without hope. And meanwhile the French, drawn nearer, were occupying the heights overlooking the town, and making elaborate preparations for attack. The whole army watched them with resigned despair. At the last moment, when all was completed, the expected convoys hove in sight. It was too late. Battle was launched already.

This time it raged. Advance, attack, repel, retreat : shoot, stand, march, fall, die.

In a hollow between the two armies lay the little village of Elvina, peaceful cluster of dwellings, quiet as on the first day of creation. Turn by turn the opposing armies captured it : the houses were shattered by shot and ball, the streets rang with cries, shouts, orders, as the village was taken and re-taken. Relentless, engulfing, the tide of battle swung, to and fro, across the ravaged hamlet. In the very height of its fury, Sir John Moore fell, severely wounded. Wrapped in a blanket, his left arm hanging by a shred, bleeding from a wound that could not be staunched, he was borne by six soldiers to the rear. Heedless of him, the battle continued. Attack, repulse : slay, and be slain. The French were hurled back at all points :

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the English remained masters of the field ; Sir John died hearing at last the shouts of victory.

At nightfall the troops were ranged upon the sea-shore : sick, guns, horses, and soldiers. All night the British army was embarking : while above, on the citadel of Corunna, hurriedly, at midnight, and by a lantern's glow, they buried Sir John Moore. By the first dawn the whole of the British forces was on board the fleet and leaving Portugal.

But Perroquet lay all night in the deserted village of Elvina. For here was his goal, this was the end of his journey. A journey unbelievably strange, tragic, unexpected. Life, so confusing, so tremendous, in the end defeats you. Here, in this hamlet, he was born : here he had desired to return. Elvina, beloved village, near the twin, blue bays ; the beauty of the skies, the beauty of the women, and above all, the beauty of the children. He heard his voice speaking again to the Chaplain. But when he had got here, the village was destroyed, the houses razed, unrecognisable. Himself worn out, almost dead, with hunger, toil, privations, and scenes of misery and tumult. The death of Douglas weighed still like a burden on his spirit. His loneliness returned, intensified. Everyone he knew or cared for, even for a short while, he lost. Andrea, Mr. Granby, Douglas, even the gay Dragoon. His physical hunger, for he had not eaten for two days, was nothing beside the intolerable emptiness within his heart.

And what a campaign ! Calamitous, destructive. What good had come of it all ? The loss of heroic and gallant men. The loss of an honourable leader, guilty only of poor skill : the surrender of hundreds of humble lives ; the sacrifice of animals ; the loss of treasure. Pain in the hearts of friends, mothers and wives. . . .

All night he lay thinking of this : hearing afar the groaning rumble of cannon or the sharp rattle on the sea-shore where the sick horses were being shot. All night he watched the distant flares on the heights lighting the sky,

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and, close at hand, the houses of Elvina burning and smoking in the darkness. This spectacle, at first dreadful, sublimed at last into a sort of beauty: as if this ardent glow could no longer touch him, but hung like a painted echo on the mind, the lovely and unreal effulgence of a dream.

In the shelter of the ruins he lay at peace. It was over, the turmoil and shouting. He felt as if the destiny that had been driving him was exhausted, fulfilled. Here in the slack of the eddy of battle he could rest, melancholy yet comforted.

The ground swept smoothly away from under his cheek where he was lying: at a little distance the horizon was abruptly broken and brought near. Beside a pile of shattered timber and fallen walls rose the outline of an abandoned cart: its shafts and sharp angles jagged with blackness the glow of leaping flames beyond. All night long he watched this silhouette, lighted with fires, shift and change. . . . An individual movement and a sad, small cry seemed to come, impossibly, from the heart of this fantastic sky-line. . . .

Near dawn he slept. But at sunrise, he woke again. The ineffable joy of the sun's rays were showing now behind the stars. The ruined village lay deserted and dead. Not a dog, not a mouse, moved among the blackened débris. Not a sound broke the stillness. Yet in that icy and early hush he seemed to hear again a small wail, very thin, coming from somewhere, high but not distant. Summoning all his strength, he pulled himself, groaning, off the ground. The eastern sky was rosy, but the light was grey, he could only just see. He clambered up with difficulty beside the ruins to the abandoned cart, whose silhouette, mingling with his dreams, had formed his night's horizon. On the top of it, on a heap of bundles, a woman was lying. A very fair woman, young still, still beautiful. A Hollander perhaps, a soldier's wife, a camp-follower. She was quite dead. Crawling about upon her, and lifting its little blue eyes and wailing, was a few weeks' old baby girl.

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They looked at each other, these two, the only living things in the world.

"Well, my little Skyline!" said Perroguet weakly, in the shock of surprise. The babe kicked its legs and stuck its arms into the air towards him.

He picked it up, the tiny thing. It was blue with cold, but it stopped wailing at once. As he held it it nuzzled towards him. A feeling he had never before encountered stirred Perroguet: he stood, speechless, shaken with its power.

He opened his coat and pressed the baby into its shelter: then he staggered forth towards Corunna to find some food.

P A R T I I

H I L I

L

CHAPTER X

ALAS, it was easier to think of food than to obtain it. As the sun rose, giving a little warmth, and gilding the heights in the clear and cold blue air, Perroguet marched towards the town, reflecting on his present condition, and turning over in his mind some means of procuring what he wanted. He had no money, his clothes were rags, he had lost his flute. After this nightmare of the last few months, wholly removed from natural life, he felt he could scarce remember the time when he had earned and bought bread for himself. Besides this, he was desperately tired, and weak from hunger.

On a little rise in the ground he halted, drawing into his lungs the stinging breeze from the sea, and looking with hope into the distance. The roofs of Corunna lay there, catching the light : and beyond them stretched a glittering blue line. Yet every few minutes a concussion still shook the air, and the guns on the heights thundered towards the bay, seeking to sink the British men-of-war as they made their way out of the harbour.

Mr. Granby would be somewhere on board, no doubt—holding forth upon the sacred cause of freedom, or their merciful deliverance, or the calamitous campaign, or perhaps, even, declaiming about the bright blue waters of home : he would not, at least, any longer need an interpreter. . . . ‘But I mustn’t think of him,’ thought Perroguet, ‘I have finished with them ; have I not ?’ The early-morning cold intensified his hunger. Who in the town would be about so early ? What shops open ? Bakers, for certain. The first baker’s, then, thought Perroguet hopefully.

Towards the outskirts of the town ran a narrow street

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with a row of ancient houses, leaning together as if exchanging confidences. Something about them pleased and reassured him. They were like charming old ladies maintaining their quiet tradition in face of alarms. All their windows were uncurtained, but too small and too dark to admit curiosity from the street. Passing them rapidly, he was suddenly pulled up short. From behind a black-painted front a delicious odour had emerged. He retraced a pace or two. There was a faint name on the black paint over the low bow-window. Peering in, at first he could discern nothing : then he saw some pancakes of rye flour, some sacks of biscuits, and at the back of the shop piles of bread straight from the oven cooling on a criss-cross wooden frame. Their dark richness was almost intolerable. He had not seen so much food, all in one place, for many a day. Lifting his hand, Perroguet knocked on the door. The sound seemed startling, so perfect a miniature of the guns thudding above.

No answer. He knocked again. After a long time some convulsion appeared to be taking place in the interior : grating and groaning announced the withdrawal of bolts ; and the door opened a few inches to reveal a small, sharp face whitened with flour and blinking in the early light.

"I am hungry, brother," said Perroguet impulsively.
"I need bread. And I need milk."

The baker looked out at him with hostile enquiry. In the baker's eyes he read his dirtiness, his poor and haggard look, so ill in keeping with his imperious knocking.

"So you want bread," said the baker, lifting a pale bony hand with broken nails, and rubbing his chin. "Well, I do not say that I cannot oblige you. By good fortune I happen to have some. Naturally, it has become very expensive since the arrival of the English and the French troops in the town."

' You work quickly, my friend, these people have only been here a few hours,' thought Perroguet ; but he said quietly enough : " I have not any money at present.

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Later, perhaps tomorrow, after I have earned some I will pay you."

A white convulsion shook the face before him. "Be off!" screamed the baker with passion. "Be off, impostor and robber!" He made as if to slam the door. Perroguet put out his foot, swollen and torn within its broken shoe, and kicked it open again. The baker sprang forward, shaking his fists, dancing and stamping in his rage.

"No, no! Do not dare to think I will let you enter. Is it not enough to have had my shop broken into yesterday and ransacked by the accursed infantry? Only by the grace of San Jeronimo I had already hidden my best bags of flour. Everything else they took. Yes, even the old biscuits with the weevils. And you dare to come here in broad daylight——"

"I have a little child," began Perroguet desperately.

"I don't care if you have fifty children. You shall not feed them at my expense."

"Its mother is dead," began Perroguet again. "Listen, brother, listen one moment. You know not how I have suffered. Look!—" With hunger, vexation, alarm sharpening in his voice, he began to burrow under his coat.

"I thought so!" exclaimed the baker. "A professional beggar. No, do not trouble to show me your sores, a little soap and water would no doubt remove them, though what a pity it would be to waste the art you have expended." He raised his pale face cunningly, looking like a weevil out of one of his own biscuits. "Be off, before the other beggars catch sight of you! Aha, they are jealous, the beggars of Corunna, in two minutes they would tear you in pieces!" Without altering his expression, but with a sudden swift movement, the baker shut the door violently in his face.

Perroguet was left, furious and perplexed. As if dazed, he passed his hand across his brow. That life was over, then, when want was the common foe, when one shared what one had with neighbour or comrade. Now it was

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pay or go without. Earn or starve. He must remember that. He must try and recall the old ways of earning. . . .

His anger against the baker gradually sank. These people had not been in war, these snug shopkeepers had not suffered. The only distresses they had ever seen were those of their beggars. And suddenly Perroguet realised that the words he had used were the standard professional opening, his very voice, for some reason, had risen into a kind of beggar's whine. He blushed with shame and weakness, thinking he could hear it still. What a mistake.—Never mind. Courage ! One mistake is nothing. He must continue undaunted. For now there was not only himself—

He looked up the road. A few people had come out of their houses, they were standing in knots at corners, talking nervously and glancing about in agitation, fearing what they might lose in the stress of these new events. All at once Perroguet felt himself stronger, richer, happier than they. His very heart beat more firmly from the warmth of the child nestled against it. From his heart to the extremities of his body radiated slowly a feeling of exultation. . . .

Then a fearful idea swept him. "The child will be suffocating, he thought, in terrified alarm. He dragged the bundle forth.

It looked hideous in the sunshine. The babe's rags, the scanty hairs on its head, its face, its whole body, were unspeakably dirty, the bright light spared nothing. But it was now quite warm. Its fingers were spread apart, like pink stalks, motionless, as if pressed against the world. The two thumbs at its lips, quietly it slept, its hands like this.

The attitude was absurd. But, as Perroguet looked, a little twitching raised the corners of the mouth, the babe seemed to smile in its sleep : it stuck its thumbs in farther and began to suck them. All at once Perroguet saw that the hands were shaped as if to receive a gift, as if like a funnel to lead all treasures towards that tiny and smiling mouth. "And so you shall, little Skyline," he said, pur-

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suing his thought. "We shall see. We can do better than this."

He sat down where he was by the roadside and began to tear strips off his long cloak. The fabric parted easily, it had been wetted through and frozen so often. When the strips were sufficient, he used some to wrap the child's body against the cold, with the rest making a sling that slipped over his shoulder and hung at his back like a knapsack. In this hammock the child rested. It was drowsed with warmth and weakness. But it had not cried since Perroguet picked it up.

With this burden he trudged up the road again, keeping a look-out for anything that might serve him. Several streets were traversed before any promise showed. At last, at a corner where two thoroughfares met, a prosperous building spread itself, The Leon d'Oro, as its notice announced : at whose front door, dressed in a long brown coat and plush breeches with pearl buttons at the knee as large as saucers, straddled the owner. Perroguet observed him attentively. Some portliness of figure, relieved by brisk actions and a firm pose : a soft, slouching hat shading the glances of a sharp, inquisitive eye. He looked what he was—a son of Galicia with a kind heart and a quick temper. He was not a weevil, at least.

Perroguet crossed the street and stood before him. He pulled off his hat and bowed stiffly. His joints still racked him ; and bowing made him giddy. He mustered a smile from his inner warmth and spoke in his most engaging manner.

"No doubt, sir, you would be glad to allow a well-trained musician to entertain your travellers for an hour or two ? Ah, the sweet charcas of Portugal, age-old but still enchanting ! Who would not listen to those ? The soft ballads of Spain, balm to the heart of every Spanish lover of—"

The innkeeper started as if he had been shot.

"What are you talking about, in God's name ? Can't you hear the cannons roaring from the ships in the bay ?

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Don't you know every able-bodied Spaniard is manning the batteries against the French? Can't you hear, up there, on the hills of St. Lucia, Marshal Soult bombarding the fleet?"

"How much pleasanter, then, to shut one's ears to these terrifying noises and open them instead to a sweet, melodious—"

"You must be mad. We don't want such trash here. We are in the midst of very serious events. And look. Clear off. That's my advice. You won't earn anything here. But hold. What have you got in that bundle on your back? Loot, I'll be bound. All you rogues think that just because the armies have passed through Corunna you can plunder as boldly as the French or the English. Oh yes, I've heard about the plunderings. I've heard all about the Retreat. I know it all." He looked at Perroguet narrowly, shifting his mind. "What are you? A refugee?"

"I am, at least I was, an English Chaplain's servant," said Perroguet, keeping down his anger and his hunger and his giddiness and speaking mildly: "I was his interpreter, his cook, his valet, yes, almost his friend. I am also a musician. I came with the British troops all the way from Castello Branco: even the last terrible marches across the mountains I endured with them. I am not a thief. I am not a rogue. I am neither Spanish nor Portuguese. At the same time I am now come to my birthplace, the village of Elvina, just behind us. I come to this village, I come from a long way to visit this village of my birth; all I find is flames, ruins, abuse, bad names, no food. . . . I have not eaten for two days. All I ask is to earn some money, for myself and another, for we are starving."

'English Chaplain. Troops. Elvina,' thought the inn-keeper. 'That, of course, makes it a different matter. Have not the English been our friends all through?' Clearly impressed by this recital, he regarded the stranger newly; an air of the unusual in this personality was obvious, but it was not altogether unpleasing. He put

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his thumb and forefinger behind his front teeth and let them fly past them in a manner he had when reflecting.

"There are two Portuguese families here at present, also an old Spanish gentleman, Don Domingo Minho. I do not know whether they would care for your songs or not. Still, you appear an honest fellow, on closer survey, and if what you say is true I have no quarrel with you. I think I will after all let you into the place, and the caballero may give you something."

He pushed open the heavy door of the posada, pleased with his own perspicacity and generosity, and in a moment was leading the way towards the public room from which opened the corridor to the guests' apartments. Perroguet thankfully passed after him. At once the cheerful scents of wine and of breakfast cooking smote his nostrils with an overwhelming fragrance. Alas, unaccustomed to his burden, he was not quick through the doorway nor thoughtful enough for what he bore: the closing door knocked sharply upon the bundle made out of the torn cape. A staccato cry came forth from it.

In an instant the innkeeper had turned, his face crimson, his eyes flashing. "*What!* A hen, a stolen chicken in your very knapsack? Blood of Christ! this is too much. You say you starve, you have no money, and you carry a stolen fowl upon you. And I was just going to admit you. The saints only know what you might have robbed us of. I was right, after all, at the first. Indeed, I am seldom mistaken in appearances, I—"

Slowly, feeling suddenly stifling and enfeebled, Perroguet swung his sling from his shoulders. He parted the folds of the cloak. Two small blue eyes looked out of a pink puckered face. Small limbs were agitated in the midst of a weak, breathless wailing. "It is a child," he said.

"Mother of God!" exclaimed the innkeeper, springing back like a cat. He was thoroughly startled. There was something about the whole business he could not understand. Recovering, however, in a minute, he advanced

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cautiously, endeavouring to conceal his betrayal of surprise by the calm, enquiring air of a man of the world. "May I enquire, did you bring this, too, across the mountains, from Castello Branco, to visit your birthplace?"

Perroquet could not speak. He shook his head.

"Ah: it is the Chaplain's child, then, no doubt," continued the innkeeper happily. "Certainly it looks English. So pink, so blonde. So now you are on your way to find your master and restore the infant. Chk, chk! I can tell you, you are a bit late. They are all embarked by now. Yes, undoubtedly you have missed the transport. What are you going to do now, eh? But wait, they may not all have gone. Let me see—"

Perroquet made a great struggle to emerge from the waves of annihilation that were engulfing him. "No, it is not the Chaplain's child," he murmured.

"I see," said the innkeeper kindly. "Your own. Well, you might have said so at first. There's nothing to be ashamed of, my good fellow, having a child. But why can't its mother carry it about? Having another, eh? Why do you not answer? Yes, that must be it. Well, well. So we go on. You are a good father to care for the infant. She, your wife, will be in need too, poor soul. Stay, don't trouble to sing, I need no payment; you look thin and really very exhausted: perhaps I could—hi, Camillo!—perhaps I could find a morsel of breakfast for you and a drop of milk for your baby."

Perroquet rose to the surface with a determined effort of will. Something had to be said. Extremely important. "It—is—not—*my*—baby," he began very seriously, "it—" His words stopped suddenly and he lurched forward against the wall.

"Hey, you're *drunk*!" shouted the innkeeper furiously. His kindly manner had vanished in a flash. He was angrier than ever at being twice deceived. "You're a liar, and a thief, and you're drunk. I knew it from the first. I'm seldom wrong. Take up the brat and clear out!" At that moment the Spanish gentleman's servant was heard calling for the host. "Begone, you ruffian,"

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shouted the innkeeper, seizing the stranger and hurling him from the door. " May the dogs eat you and all your children, to the very last one. Saying you're starving, and saying you're a Chaplain's servant, and coming here reeking of drink, so full you can't stand. May Corunna be freed from liars and rascally vagabonds like you!—Yes, my lord, yes, my caballero, yes, Don Domingo Minho, I'm just coming."

But Perroguet did not hear him. He was sitting by the roadside, the child on his knee, his head bowed, waiting for the faintness to pass.

By and by he felt stronger : he struggled up again, and went on.

All day he wandered through the streets of Corunna. At midday the sun was fiercely hot, adding drought to his sufferings. Nobody helped him, nobody listened to him, nobody gave him anything. Everyone he addressed turned away impatiently. The whole town was thronged with ragged and starving refugees. Every hour they flocked in, more and more, men, women and children. At every shop, at every house, they begged for food and shelter. The streets were stuffed with them. Many were in the last stages of exhaustion, it was clear they would perish soon. They would lie down and die in the clean streets of the town.

The Mayor was frantic. His hands were full ; he could do no more. Every now and then a terrific explosion shook the air as one of the cannons went off on the hill. Already, earlier in the day, two large powder-magazines had exploded by mistake, breaking the windows of houses by the concussion, killing a good many townsfolk, and terrifying everybody. The citizens were alarmed for their own safety. The men, he was proud to see, continued to give what help they could in the common cause, the women, between their fears, to wave their handkerchiefs towards the departing allies : but as for the starving mobs in the streets, who could care for so many ?

Perroguet saw this too : he realised his troubles were lost in the magnitude of the distress ; the mere sight of

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destitution no longer aroused pity. If he had had his full strength—ah, that would indeed have been different : what a story he could have made of their passage of the mountains, of the terrible storms, of the wolves and eagles, of their hardships, of the dead and the dying ; yes, all, except the death of Douglas. What a crowd he would have had round in a few minutes, weeping, sympathising, throwing quartos into his cap. The women would have left off fluttering from their balconies to those who were now, in any case, safe, and would instead have yielded their thoughts to one who had suffered as much as they, been frozen on the same hills, and shared the same perils, and who was now himself desperately in want, and with another dependent on him. But now he was too tired. His throat was too dry and weak. He could not tell the tale properly, even to get a little milk for the child.

For a long time now it had not made any movement. Quite soon it, too, would be dead of hunger. ‘ Shall I cut my finger,’ thought Perroquet desperately, ‘ and let it suck that ? That might help it to survive a little longer, until perhaps when the crowds have passed someone may notice the little thing. How gladly I would cut off my whole hand to nourish the infant ! . . . ’ He found to his surprise that he was singing : that is to say, a cracked voice not in the least resembling his own was croaking in his ear one of his favourite French ballads, that one about the snow-white foal, found in the field at dawn. . . . Dimly he noticed this, and that the long shadows of late afternoon, slanting away from trees and buildings, were striping the open places with purple and gold : and that, overtopping all, boomed the continued echo from where the French were still firing on the hill. Then he noticed something else : the face of a French officer, a few yards away, observing him with interest. From the dust at the road’s edge where he had fallen, Perroquet called across to him, eagerly, cloaking his despair.

“ Hola, mon Capitaine ! Could you, for the love of God, give me some money for a little milk ? ”

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"*Milk?*" asked the officer with astonishment. "I'm afraid I cannot oblige you. An unusual demand, indeed. It is generally wine you fellows are in search of." He laughed shortly, and strode away, twirling his big moustaches. Indeed, he was a brave man to have ventured into the town at all that day.

Nobody else seemed to have heard the song. Perroguet looked round. He was too weak to rise to his feet unaided, with his burden, light as it was. A ringed wooden stake was beside him, one to which they tied mules and horses: with its help he staggered up. He adjusted the sling on his shoulder, and rousing all his forces he stumbled on.

He had now come to the eastern border of the town. Beyond lay the fields and open country. "Let us die at least in the open country," he said to the little bundle.

The sky darkened above him as the evening shadows strengthened. After he had passed the wall a deep blue shade came up from behind the town and spread itself slowly over the heavens till it reached the farthest horizon: beneath this the road led forward, grey and bare, narrowing to the unknown. On each side the country floated away smoothly into the violet dusk. An intense cold began to diffuse itself from the deep shade of the sky, and to creep inwards from the still, damp fields. . . . Strange, one didn't die. One just kept staggering on, on. How long would it take a man to cease walking and to die? Even a man who was well and strong and had eaten something? . . . Now the road was almost too dark to see. A kind of machinery worked one's legs, so that they moved, one after the other, in the same direction, upon what seemed to be the road.

Here and there lights from the farms began to twinkle. All at once, out of the rising mist, in one of the fields he heard a kid bleating. It was a thin, wailing sound, it seemed familiar. Was it long ago, in some other life, he had heard that sound, or had the kid blue eyes and a small smiling mouth and ragged clothing? Half dazed, he stopped and looked towards the meadow. The mother had bounded forward at once, from across the field, to the

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little one's side. Now, already, the kid was abandoned to its greed, lost in absorption of its own interest, feeding with jerks, wriggles, wag-waggings of its tail. In a fit of jealousy Perroguet regarded it, hating its enjoyment. "Thy voice brings thee milk more easily than mine!" he said bitterly, turning away.

Through the dusk a homing labourer came slowly towards him. His eyes bent before him on the roadway, bowed, tired, thinking of rest, he neither saw nor heard nor heeded the kids in the field. Another of them was bleating now. As indifferent as the rest of the flock, the labourer pursued his solitary course.

Something struck Perroguet in the midst of his fainting and muddled fancies. "I understand now," he said to himself. "It is only a mother's ear that can hear."

As firmly as he could he strode forward to the farmhouse. A tree was at the gate; when he had passed it suddenly the house was very close. Under the light in the kitchen a woman was standing, motionless. Perroguet knocked on the door. After a minute the woman opened it.

A flood of light poured out on to the figure of the man, gaunt, browned, terribly thin, weak and yet blazing with fever and with famine, and holding out in his arms, without a word, a tiny child, quite still, made of wax.

"Blessed hijito!" said the woman, crossing herself: "is it alive?"

"Yes, if you will feed it," said Perroguet. "Otherwise it is dead."

The child opened its eyes and looked up.

The woman gave a sob. Her hands fluttered swiftly to her breast. Then she took the child and without saying anything carried it into the inner room. For half an hour there was no sound: only the warmth and the light of the house steadily pouring itself out in kindness over the night-dark fields.

Then the woman came back to the door. She did not have the baby. She had instead a resolute and flashing look, as if arming herself for battle.

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The look died from her face when she found the man was no longer there. So. That would make it very simple. Her husband would be pleased too. At least, he would not object. She sighed with relief, laying her hand to her heart.

Then she saw him. Fallen just where he had been standing, sunk in a heap in the shadow beside the door.

"Poor stranger," said the peasant woman, bending over him, her mood melted at once. "Thou, too, art famished, like the babe. Why, thy clothing is rotting and soaked with the dew. I cannot drag thee into the house, but I can chafe thy hands and bring thee some broth from the pot. That will revive thee, poor wanderer. Thy child is asleep : warm and well-fed. She is happy, and so am I, who lost my baby. See now, perhaps we shall keep thee, and the child too. There is fresh straw in the cow-stable : my man shall help thee there, soon, when he is home from work."

CHAPTER XI

I

THEY were well off, these peasants : their fields were of rye and potatoes, and they had two cows in addition to the herd of goats. It taxed all their strength to keep these things looked after as they should be : and in addition, all through the first sharp days of February, they tended Perroguet.

Lying on his straw in the cow-stable he marvelled at their energy, their perseverance, and their kindness. How could he ever repay all their care ? Perhaps by working for them as soon as he was able ? Perhaps, though, they would not need his work. Well, he could watch, and see if any way came to serve them. . . . Thus he thought, lying on his back, hearing the rain and the wind beating on the roof of halved pine-trunks, which let the water through every here and there ; and thinking happily of the child, snug and dry in the small house.

In the evenings the man came often and smoked a pipe, and gave Perroguet snuff, and told him the whole story of his life. This story of the man's life became wearisome to Perroguet in the end : yet he could not, from civility, show a slackening interest : all he could do was to stem the tide at times by the offer of a song, in any language. This at first the man sternly refused, as if it were something improper : then once or twice he listened, in plain, though guilty, enjoyment : and at last, one reckless evening, he actually joined in ; his voice, which distinguished with difficulty the low notes from the high, bringing an excruciating accompaniment to the duet. Perroguet, shutting his ears, opened his

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heart. He was pleased to see the man's happiness : though quite unaware why it was tinged with shame. It was a long while before he discovered the reason, and that only by a chance, nervous remark the man made, relating to his wife : it then became clear that his soul (and his wife too) accused him in this indulgence of *wasting time*. After this there was an unspoken pact between them : the stable door was shut and the wind was from the house before they raised their voices in song.

As long as Perroquet was weak and ill the woman came every morning, bringing him food and water, and a steady, cheerful face of condolence.

Indeed she was sorry for him, and laboured for him gladly. The difference between his lot and theirs struck deeply in her mind. 'Here we are,' she would feel. 'Myself, my man, the child. The house is clean and warm, the bed is well stuffed : we have oil for the lamp when it is dark, and we have two meals every day. When I lost my baby I felt we were halved : but now there is again the three of us. It is complete. It is cosy. It is like the Holy Family, the Three-in-One. No, I think I have got that wrong. I could never understand it, anyway : all that is beyond me. But this I know. Our fields are fertile, our flocks fruitful : we own earth. But he—he has no home, no hearth, none even to love him. No money. No means of earning it but some ridiculous music that would run away with everybody's time if anyone were foolish enough to stop and listen to it. His hair, too, is not cared for. Also, does he ever go to Mass ? I dare not even consider the condition of his soul. . . . However, he looks strong, and quick to learn. Our last hired man was quite useless—idle and dirty. And when my man was away he tried to make love to me. Yet it will again be too much for us without extra help, at the busy season. This is a country-man, I can tell by his deep chest. He will help us at the busy time, and in return we will keep him until then. After that, we shall see.'

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She had another thought too. Perroguet had told them, quite early, the story of the finding of the child. The woman had been pleased. She had felt that in that case Perroguet had no more right to it than she herself. She did not stress this. Indeed, she never mentioned it. But she felt in her heart she need say nothing, the child would give its love instinctively to the being who nourished it. Nevertheless, a queer feeling of theft, of pity for the robbed stranger, of gratitude, too, as well as common charity, caused her to nurse him steadily back to strength.

Perroguet had no idea of all this that was going on in her mind. He was grateful automatically, like a sick animal, for her care and feeding. As his strength returned he found himself able to do light tasks such as sorting the potatoes that were for seed, or shepherding the goats from one pasture to another. For meals he went up to the house where they sat comfortably at a table, eating eggs cooked in oil and garlic, with buccalao and rice, and on Sundays a stew of kid's flesh and potatoes roasted in butter and black salt. Perroguet would have liked to have helped in the cooking, showing, for instance, how best to soften the dried fish of the buccalao, but seeing the woman's smooth, strong assurance, he did not dare. The child was never present at these meals : she was whisked away beforehand into some back chamber. Whenever Perroguet asked to see her, "She is sleeping," the woman would say with serenity : immediately afterwards hastening to refill his plate with the best pieces, and pour him fresh milk from the horn mug.

At last Perroguet used to steal up at times when he knew the woman was absent and peep in through the window at the child's basket in the living-room. She was there always, rosy and smiling. Since coming to the farm the little bundle had altered beyond recognition. Her limbs were firm and rounded, her head a circle, divided into two curves (one for the head and the brow, one for the cheek and chin) : and crowned with a shimmering down of gold. Her eyes were blue as heaven and fixed

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always on some happy dream, and her skin shone from the incessant washing by the woman. Sometimes she would be flat on her back with her toes up, wondering if they belonged to her or to the dim distances: sometimes she was sitting, propped by the straw pillow, stretching out her hands to catch the walls, or the table, or the sunbeams: or at last, as she grew, pulling herself up by the top rail of her basket on to her feet that were so fat they resembled cubes.

She had not yet learnt that feet were to stand on: as soon as she felt the exhilarating sensation of pressure upon her soles, in triumph and delight she would kick them up, chuckling, in order to see them, the strange things, and to express to them her pleasure and joyous interest. At once she would fall, plomp! upon her little tail. Her face of surprise and dismay made Perroguet laugh till the tears ran down. He would grin in through the window, tapping and waving to her. But she could not see as far as that yet. From her fallen position she would agitate her legs and arms, and he would take that as a greeting. And then perhaps she would sit up again, and pulling out from the basket a strand she had broken off some time ago, she would bite upon it happily with her new teeth and her gums, slobbering, blowing bubbles, and warbling a little song of her own. "Ah bah-bah bloh btha-dtha-dtha mummmm." Perroguet would sweep off his hat with delight. "I understand you perfectly, Mademoiselle. I, too, know just what it is to feel like that. But I have never been able to express it so charmingly or with such true feeling." In the midst of this perhaps the farmer's wife would return, to find Perroguet innocently stooping in the tying of a shoe-latchet, or whistling an air in careless unconcern.

For Perroguet was quite content to have it thus. He, too, knew in his heart that the child's love would in the end exclusively be his.

They still called her "the child." "What is her name?" asked the woman one day with a little, hard, anxious look.

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" Well, I called her 'Skyline,'" said Perroguet impulsively. They accepted that. It was foreign, anyway: they couldn't understand it. Skyline she became. At least to all but herself: for herself she could not manage it. *Hi-li*, she repeated happily: and it did very well.

All the summer he laboured for the man and the woman. Service with the Chaplain had removed for ever the horror of being a servant; besides, the work was not difficult, taxing only the muscles and sinews: and the regular labour, the rising with the sun and the resting at its setting, invoked a harmony with natural things that filled his life with a kind of sustained and restrained force resembling the huge natural powers of the earth, that brought him happiness and wonder. 'The music of the spheres?' he thought, a little understanding. Standing on the hot, brown soil in mid-field, leaning for a moment over his spade and mopping his brow, he felt his body stirring with a fresh, more vigorous life: it rippled over his spine like a wind from a new continent. 'These are my hands,' he would think, looking at them—brown, already coarsened with labour, knotted at the veins and glistening with sweat, 'the sun is shining straight down through all that space upon these, my hands. Can it see them, as I can see it? It shines upon my head, upon me, Perroguet. My shadow falls on those clods of soil: I stand between the earth and the sun. The earth is cold where my shadow falls, the beetles and ants there look up, they think the heavens are clouded. The sweat drops from my brow and soaks in a dark spot into the dry, crumbly ground: they scurry indoors, fearing it is a thunderstorm. But as for me, my head is in the blue sky, it is a lyre through which the wind sings between one ear and the other. Yes, all my body and bones and the thoughts in my head were made, not out of the sea, as some have it, but out of the brown earth and the hot sun's rays and the wind under the sky.' . . .

With the other peasants he stood in a row; digging all together, taking up a whole line of earth under their

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forks at the same time. The furrows thus were perfectly even, to receive the next crop or to take up the one that was ripe. The man himself worked on the inner length of the field ; he gave the orders to turn or advance, he called the time for the noonday meal and for the evening rest. Under his voice the peasants grunted, "Huh—ha !—Huh—ha !" as they thrust the forks in and then out of the soil. Perroguet found the words turning in his head, mingling with the grunting breaths, the regular motions of swing and push advancing slowly across the field, and overhead the sun's huge daily wheel and decline. Out of that familiar and ancient Huh—ha ! he made at last a digging chanty, so charged, as he felt, with purity and force—just those essential words and notes that fitted perfectly into the action and helped its accomplishment—that he could not understand why the whole field of labourers did not burst into it at once.

On the contrary, for some time he had to sing it alone : to this he was nothing loath, save that it caused his fellow-workers to turn from him with suspicion and disgust. A new thing was a thing to be hated : this, too, Perroguet understood, though sorrowfully. Then one morning a young peasant woman, leaving her baby in the shade and starting off on the day's work, found herself yielding the song without knowing she did so : one by one, as the forks were buried and heaved up, the workers grunted all along the line the now-familiar melody : it seemed no longer strange that they should sing it, it seemed strange only that they should not sing what they had known all their lives. . . . An exquisite tremor seized Perroguet at the sight of those dusty and sweaty backs bowed to his tune, the coarse peasants' voices grunting in unison. The man's fields were filled with the satisfying melody of toil : the singing of the peasants became known throughout the neighbourhood.

The woman's displeasure was extreme. She tossed her head in a very marked manner when the two men came in to meals, enquiring whether the *open-air concert* was

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still in progress or not : but as the results showed no wastage of time but rather an increase in work, she was obliged to modify her criticisms, exchanging them for comments on the inherent childishness of males.

Thus, as the weeks passed, Perroguet remained, labouring incessantly, and lightening his labours as he might. He could not leave the man and his wife : he owed them gratitude. In any case he could not go away without money, and besides, they still kept the child. It pleased him, too, for a while to think of himself being here in the part of the world where years ago his father had come with the beautiful Spanish girl, and had painted the long fields of rye and the blue hills and the glitter of sea beyond. His father had said : "No wandering for *you*, my son. You shall be a doctor ; a man of science, or perhaps a lawyer. I hear they make a lot of money. Yes, you shall go to some University or other. There are plenty of good ones in Germany, and in Italy too, for sons of good families. You shall be the solid one, the gentleman. I shall come and stay in your nice house in my old age."

As a change from his manual labour in the fields the farmer sometimes entrusted him to go into Corunna to sell goat's-milk cheeses, or milk, or a sack of grain. It was a tiring walk, thus laden, but Perroguet's new-found muscles enjoyed it. He enjoyed, too, visiting Corunna again, not seen since that bitter and crowded day. Fortunately he did not have to enter by the road that led past the baker's : he could not have endured to retrace his disappointments, to see again that weevil face. He avoided, too, the Leon d'Oro and its hasty and imaginative owner : who yet might not, he reflected, recognise in a sturdy peasant the broken, drunken, lying vagabond. A pleasant, an amusing conjecture, that one shrank from putting to proof.

Corunna was clean and orderly : its pretty, neat houses nestled under the cliff, each with its garden surrounded by a hedge of white aloes : its harbour, filled with peaceful shipping, sparkled in the afternoon sun as if no angry

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cannon-balls had torn its surface on a grey morning. Here and there a blackened ruin not yet restored, here and there a figure with a military bearing, and on the heights where Soult had lain, a monument to Sir John Moore, were all that remained to remind the stranger of the city's part in the campaign.

Perroguet confined himself to the big shopping-places and the squares. Sometimes there were things to be bought and carried out to the farm. Here, too, there was gossip, a constant clacking of comment on the events which had thrust Corunna into history. Here he learnt how on the departure of the British troops, indeed, with the disappearance of the last transport over the horizon, the Governor, Don Antonio de Alcedo, had prudently placed the city in the hands of the French, being himself the first to swear allegiance to King Joseph: and how, in return for this, the treacherous victors had deprived him of his office and banished him from the country. how Marshal Soult thereupon had entered the town from which the British bayonets earlier had kept him: and how, on his attempting the siege of the impregnable fortress, Ferrol, on the opposite side of the bay, crammed with fiery patriots breathing vengeance on the French, he had found the military and civil authorities equally agreeable, for a consideration, to its surrender. This tale of criss-cross treacheries did not appal the townspeople: it was, after all, War. Besides, the hordes of French officers now in occupation brought custom to their shops; the town continued very pleasantly under the new régime.

Interesting though this was, it had ceased to touch Perroguet personally: especially as a new and pressing desire had arisen. With what longing, when he bought goods for the farmer, he wished he were able to purchase for himself! But he had nothing, not even the smallest coin. Nor could he stop and earn some, for this, among these open-mouthed but close-fisted townspeople, would take time, and his time was the farmer's, he must be back by nightfall, there were the young goats to fold.

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He must, whatever came, give the farmer this allegiance, for the man fed and sheltered him, and the woman kept Hili. And that was it. She was all kindness to the child, she gave her everything : it irked Perroguet increasingly that he could provide nothing for her upkeep. In addition to everything else, the woman now made clothing for her : it was warm and soft, and she was always adding to it, for as fast as she fashioned the child grew. Perroguet hated these labours, to which he could not contribute. If only he could have torn the flax from the fields and woven it into a covering, or the wool from the sheep's backs to make even a shawl or a blanket ! Or better, if he could but meet Andrea ! He would let him have a yard of something-or-other for a couple of quartos : yet stay, he had not even a couple of quartos : for love, then, or on a promise. But to meet Andrea was too much to hope.

II

Thus he was thinking, one afternoon, in one of the principal squares of Corunna, where the shops of the rich merchants supplied goods in such profusion that the people could buy cheaply ; though, indeed, everything was twice as expensive since the passage of the troops. Here were provisions—eggs, beans, buccalao, walnuts, chestnuts, honey : here were the corpses of pigs, rabbits, and sheep : here, on a long front, one store alone sold copper and bone buttons, feathers, gloves, lace, and innumerable bales of cloth. Perroguet knew he should not linger : yet he could not go. There they were, spread out to the sunshine—masses of coloured stuffs, woollens and linens. Some had circles on them ; some stars ; some zigzags as if a lizard had run over them , some were marked diagonally with thin arrow-heads like the impress of birds' feet. Scarlet, blue, yellow, all the colours in the world, were massed in this bewildering and intoxicating luxuriance : it carried with it, in this enclosed space, a heady sense of luxury, of excitement, of indulgence, of enjoyment ; a sense of the *town*. . . .

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"Something for your sweetheart?" grinned the shopman at Perroguet's absorbed stare.

Perroguet looked up guiltily and flushed: his thoughts precluded a reply.

"See, here is one no lady can resist! An exquisite blue-cotton fabric just right for this weather, ornamented with these waving lines: you can see for yourself it resembles exactly the ripples on the bay on a fine morning! Clad in this, every lady fancies herself a mermaid, if not Venus, Queen of the Sea."

This was delivered in a rapid singsong, the speaker's eyes darting meanwhile from right to left among the passers-by; it was evident this particular material was not of the first class and must be sold at all costs before it fell to pieces.

Nevertheless, and as if the name of Venus had been an invocation, at that moment a scent of something intangible yet fragrant beyond believing wafted across the air. A gentle, slender presence seemed to have materialised all at once at Perroguet's elbow, against which a little pressure, as of some rich flower leaning, betrayed a warmth that derived at least from the human.

"Buy me a white shawl, do!" murmured this vision. She leaned away again from Perroguet and lifted her arched brows.

Overwhelmed by surprise and a vague surging emotion, he looked at her scarlet lips and sparkling eyes. She was very young, and elegant; dressed in a filmy black that melted in the sunshine, and poised like a bird on the high heels of her shoes which were scarlet. With her pale hand she shifted the black laces at her throat and murmured something. . . . She spoke Spanish charmingly, with a French accent, this lady of the town. She had been left over from one of the armies and had done very well for herself in Corunna: but in Perroguet she saw a country worker and she hoped he had come in to spend his year's wages. Therefore she gazed at him with a soft, dark, and expressive languor.

Perroguet had not seen anything like her for years.

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She filled him with happiness and at the same time confusion. Suddenly his farm life seemed coarse and stupid, the farmer also, and his wife—no thoughts but working, sleeping, saving money : he saw at once, too, that his own hands were thickened, his face and his clothing dusty with earth and toil, his shoulders broad as a bullock's in the farmer's jerkin.

But the lady did not notice, or did not mind. The meaning of her glance could never be mistaken : and on that invitation a hammering of the heart, a hot and overwhelming surge engulfed Perroguet from head to foot, so that he trembled at that unmistakable contact with the earth's impulse. The whole of the summer, its hot sunshine, its blue air, its physical toil and the strength that came of it, the fullness of the earth and of the spirit, seemed concentrated in a single point : and in her body summer offered itself.

"I know all the best wine-shops," the lady was saying gaily, "the owners are *particular* friends of mine."

He did not heed what she said, he felt only the stirring of his blood towards her. It was the full of the year, his strength was leaping in him : she was lovely, sparkling, slender.

"Come, buy me the shawl!" she cried softly. "If not a shawl, at least a pair of ear-rings."

But the shopman had already begun taking down the shawl : he now moved faster than ever, hearing the suggestion of a move elsewhere. In a few seconds they were brought forth and displayed ; the most expensive ones first, of course. Paralysed with confusion and conflicting sensations, Perroguet witnessed, without being able to speak, the unfolding of the white shawls.

Their texture was smooth as snow. White flowers, in silk, rose from them, softly embossed, their petals wide open and resting on the surface. A glossy sheen caressed them, like moonlight on milk. Others had bright clusters at the corners, tiny brilliant flowers of all colours, sharp as jewels, resembling Spring thrusting herself through fields of winter : from each hung a

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long silken fringe swaying like falling water. Every one was wrapped up by itself in stiff yellow paper. Lovingly these wrappers clasped their treasure: with a delicious rustle they parted from it: and tossed aside, they still kept, as in memory, the form of the body they had guarded. In the midst of all these flashing impressions, an idea, as if from heaven, visited Perroquet. At its call he made a great effort.

The lady had been sharper than the shopkeeper. Already she had divined that the stranger might not have the whole price of a shawl upon him: now she put out her hand and touched his sleeve. "Perhaps, then——"

"Mademoiselle," interrupted Perroquet in French, sweeping off his hat in his best manner and speaking for the first time, "when I shall have received the fortune of my great-grandmother, which I hourly expect, I shall be only too happy to buy you shawls; and rings too, for your pretty little ears, and your fingers, and your toes." This was the best he could do. He had no money at all. He had to tell her somehow.

The shopkeeper looked bewildered. Galician peasants seldom spoke thus. The lady, too, seemed a little put out. Before anyone could recover, a hearty and martial tread entered the shop, a loud, cheerful voice shouted to someone for attention. "Buy me a white shawl, do," said the lady at once, wistfully.

The owner of the voice slewed round on the instant. "What, Mimi! You here again? What have you done with the last I gave you? It was a yellow one that time, wasn't it, eh?"

The lady turned, fluttering into laughter, sighs, explanations. She expressed her words with every particle of her body—her hands, her arms, her eyes, her feet, even: at every movement a wriggle of vitality seemed to course down the whole length of her slender black form. The shopkeeper smiled. He left the shawls where they were, and turned to fetch down his most elaborate lace mantillas of the Spanish style, the costliest things in his shop. . . .

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Perroguet was forgotten. He crept out and did his business for the farmer, his head still filled with confused patterns, and with one dominant desire.

When it was finished, he slunk back. It was much later now, the shops were closing. The goods were being bundled into baskets to carry into safety for the night : the sheep and the rabbits were unhooked from their poles and pieces of charcoal were thrust within their bodies to ensure preservation. An air of finality and of tired bustle pervaded the drabness of the Square. The lady and her cavalier had long since departed, presumably to more delightful places. Nevertheless, it was with great caution that Perroguet made his way through the street and approached the shop, where the gorgeous cloths were already being stacked on shelves and under the counters ; fearing to hear at any moment at his elbow a gay voice sighing for a white shawl.

The shopkeeper was weary. “What do *you* want ?” he enquired without interest.

Perroguet put on his most winning manner. “I am a stranger, sir, to this town, but passing your shop, as I occasionally do, I cannot help noticing its beauty, and its superiority over all its neighbours. Your goods, for instance, are so beautifully kept. Each one wrapped up by itself Ah, there shows the true tradesman and merchant, the lover of order and progress ! There cannot be many shopkeepers in Corunna who can boast such supplies of lovely, stiff, yellow canvas to protect their wares. I wondered, my dear sir, if it would be altogether too much to ask you to spare me some pieces of this elegant material ?”

The shopman stared. The rough clothes, the polished voice, the charming smile. Suddenly he remembered him. In a flash he thought of Mimi, and the gallant officer, the costly mantilla (and the white shawl too), and, aah, the superb profit ! All these seemed connected with the person before him and with this pleasure that bored right down into his soul. He relaxed, smiling : “It is not exactly canvas, our wrappings are but paper.

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But certainly they resemble a cloth in toughness, being pressed from the rags of flax. Now, what in the world," he added, " can you be wanting it for ? "

" It is for a—well, for a— Well," said Perroguet cunningly, " to bring luck."

" I see. To inscribe a secret charm. Worn next the heart, I dare say. I know the ways of you country-people. Well, well, luck breeds luck. I will not deny you. Here is a little piece of a suitable size."

It was absurdly small. Perroguet was dismayed.

" In case I do not get it right the first time," he said, " for I am, as you see, a very poor, ignorant man, could you not give me the whole sheet, or better still, two, and if possible also that piece over there on the floor under the counter, which I now perceive has a picture of oranges upon it ? "

" Begone, before you ask for the whole shop," rejoined the merchant mildly. He was good-natured, and more than a little amused by this original yokel, whose presence appeared to have brought luck already.

He vanished for a moment into the darker regions at the back and returned with a few sheets over his arm. Seeing the country-man's flashing eye and the smile of gratitude that seemed to radiate from some inner brilliance which even a proposed charm hardly explained, he smiled too ; indulgently, with a self-deprecating gesture, he swept up a heap of crumpled papers from above and below the counter, and bundling the lot into Perroguet's arms, he thrust him out, and began to lock up.

Perroguet was enchanted. He walked on air all the way back to the farm. It was already dark when he got there. First he tended the kids (he had never been able to distinguish that one whose cry had brought Hili to the farm, though he had often supposed a happy recognition) ; then, having cleansed himself with due decorum at the water-butt, omitting nothing of the evening's ritual, so as to prolong, if possible, the delightful prospect, he marched up to the farm-house bursting with pride and news.

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The latest from Corunna was told at first. After that the sale of the cheese was detailed, the price discussed, and argued about as customary. Why not ask more and get a bigger profit? On the other hand, why not ask less and get more orders? The man picked his teeth, reflecting deeply: the woman scratched her head and knitted her brows: it was, after all, a sharp problem and a daily one; everything was increasingly expensive, yet one had to live decently. There were seldom two quartos to spare; one got nothing for nothing, nowadays. . . . Hili, of course, was not present. Perroguet knew, grinning, what would bring her out in a moment. . . . With difficulty he kept his face solemn as he said: "You say one gets nothing for nothing? Well, now, look! I will show you something I have got for nothing." He drew forth the lustrous-patterned wrappings and spread them on the table. "They are for you, mother, and for Hili."

The woman gasped. The whole table was covered. The stuff when you fingered it was stiff, yet soft, and tenacious, like fabric. She had never beheld anything like it. Without any suggestion, she recognised in a flash its supreme use. Seeing those sheaves of material, so miraculously acquired, and recalling at the same time Hili's destitute wardrobe and her own household needs, her colour rose in a kind of ecstasy, her eyes sparkled with excitement; like a mouse perceiving for the first time a whole field of corn.

What an orgy of creation they swept into! The man was quite left out of it. He stared, bemused. Hili was roused from sleep then and there: she was carried in, flushed and quiet with drowsiness: the woman, like one inspired, measured and cut: with her big needle she started at once to join the edges, she talked incessantly. Perroguet had never seen her so agitated. He, too, was busy and carried away by his creative efforts. "Ha, that is a fine little wrapper for thee, almost finished already! See this garland of roses, that will go very well upon the back. This blue piece with the line on

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the border, that will do for a hood—nay, rather, a skirt : see, it takes only a minute to fashion. This imprint of the City of Lisbon, in black and white, with all the principal buildings, how fine that looks upon the stomach ! And the basket of oranges, that goes well over all. And note, when thou rollest, the rustle as of silk. What a fine lady ! Silk gown, *frou-frou* : so stiff, so good, it stands by itself ! ”

Thereafter, for a long time, Hili was dressed in papers begged by Perroguet from the more expensive shops.

III

But gradually, as the weeks passed, and the sum of his labours increased, his indebtedness to the man and his wife diminished : at last they considered it honest to begin to give him a little money. Thus, he was never again completely penniless. And as the stress of the farm-work relaxed, he had the leisure, on his excursions into town on his master’s errands, to earn a copper or two by his own efforts. The money was little, but the feeling of emancipation was extreme. He would have been pleased to continue the concerts in the stable in the evenings or on Sunday afternoons, but the man never came now to smoke a pipe in Perroguet’s quarters, be the wind where it would : instead he stayed in the farm-room beside his wife, preoccupied and content. So Perroguet sang instead, when he got the chance, to the wicker cradle.

Already he had concocted a poem about the evening fields and the soft dusk and the kid bleating for its mother, and of the happiness of love and of shelter, and of the evening star that leads men home.

No one but the baby listened to it, or ever heard it : but the baby smiled at him out of her age-old memory, and it seemed to Perroguet, leaning in at the window, that the blue skies of Greece shone from her quiet eyes, that between them nothing was lost, they both understood.

Daily, as the summer waxed and waned, she grew stronger and rosier, and more vociferous in her demands.

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Coming one morning just before midday, by chance, round the corner of the farm-house, Perroguet was transfixed to hear yells of an unmistakable sort proceeding from the living-room. It was Hili, roaring at the top of her voice. Panic-stricken, Perroguet rushed to the door. There she was, on the floor, her face stained with tears and her dirty fingers, and scarlet with emotion: her mouth open in rage and surprise. Perroguet whistled. He felt helpless: realising with a shock the small radius of his ministrations. At that moment the woman came in: her hands were filled with the cabbages she had just pulled from the garden. Without looking at the child she put them on the table. "She is hungry, that's all," she said to Perroguet; "well, it isn't time for dinner yet"

Her manner filled him with uneasiness. He noticed it *on many occasions after this*. Since that evening of her extraordinary excitement she had sunk into an indifference which nothing disturbed, her sturdy figure of a peasant moved more deliberately than ever about her tasks. He could not bear to think that Hili was being neglected. . . . Perhaps the woman was tired, the season was coming to an end, and the work had been heavy.

"Is she well, the mistress?" he asked the man. "It is always exhausting to think the last, hardest work of the year is not yet over!"

The man looked at him with a calm gaze of confidence. "She is to have a child," he said.

To his surprise, Perroguet found himself swept with a strong feeling of joy and relief: some burden of which he had hardly been aware seemed rolling away. He took the man's hand and wished him good fortune.

As if from the moment of hearing this news, the energy of ten men seemed to flow into him.

He rose earlier than anyone else, he went to bed later. Whenever he was not wanted on the farm he hurried to some neighbouring village, or to the town: here he ran errands, held horses, swept floors, anything to earn a little extra. Many and strange were the tasks he found himself engaged in. Once, after a street accident, he

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held a man's leg while the apothecary stitched it ; the wife, who could not bear to look on, giving him a silver piece for this. Once he helped to pump out an underground wine-store near the quay, which had been flooded with sea-water : twice he was employed washing dishes for a civic banquet. No matter what : he did it thankfully with all his heart, hoping only that his lack of skill would not expose him before pay-time. All the time the little hole in the wall of the cow-stable was nicely filling up with coins.

Nevertheless, he had one great anxiety. These curious employments were useful, and indeed necessary, he would be a fool to despise them, but they were not his métier. He thought it all over for some time, and at last he went to the big shop in the Square where first he had got the papers. They knew him well there now, even though he had not liked to trouble them too often.

"*White sheets, this time, please, kind merchant Cathariz ! It is very special, very important.*"

"Indeed, I think you must have invented some means of making paper palatable," said the merchant indulgently. "You appear to consume it by the bale. It cannot be all for charms. Come, show me your talisman, if you have any."

Perroguet drew forth from under his jacket a tattered script. It was the words and the music of the old ballad. Cathariz put on his glasses. He was proud of his scholarship, he wrote all his letters himself in the finest Galician.

*Be me play lo douz temps de pascor,
Qui fai fuelhas e floras venir :
Et play mi quant aug la vandor,
Dels auzels que fan retentir—*

The writing was totally unintelligible . and so were the black dots, lines and crosses. . . . The old man was deeply impressed. He removed his glasses and returned the paper without daring to commit himself to a comment.

"I wish to know where lives one who can copy this powerful charm," said Perroguet.

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" If I did know that all this stuff is only believed in by ignorant country-folk, I should almost be tempted to feel alarmed. But it is, of course, nonsense. Ha-ha. What a foolish way to waste your money. Still, Jacob, no doubt, will be glad of it. He lives in the next street, by the barber's. He is a clever copier."

Bowing his gratitude and hastily replacing the script, Perroguet left the shop and was soon in the next street, where, depending from a rod next to the striped pole, a large iron quill with immensely long feathers emerging from an ink-horn indicated the dwelling of the man of letters.

The thick wads of manuscript that Perroguet had worn around his body throughout the retreat and which had saved his life amid its bitter snows had suffered much. Soaked, frozen, dried, soaked again, the outer sheaths were shredded away, the inner pulped to a formless mass.

Laboriously he assisted Jacob, while memory yet served him, to decipher the smudged and torn pages, here and there washed bare. This took quite a long time: he could only be in the town occasionally and sometimes Jacob could not proceed at all without him.

" Chk! You can read, but not write? " exclaimed Jacob, looking up over his enormous spectacles, and pursing his lips as he pursued the pen up and down through the long slants.

" Yes, the son of the artist can neither draw nor write. Strange, for is not writing the child of drawing? Yet if I were to write this, my friend, it would take my life-time."

It was done at last. That was a great relief. Next he had to buy a flute. That was not so easy. The only kinds he could get were ones whose stops he did not know: the local instrument-dealers were quite tired of him before he had found one he liked to play. This one was long and very thin: it had a red cord looped round the middle ending in a crimson tassel, and its mouth-piece was of bright green horn. Its tone was

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clear and yet mellow, the air ran through it sweetly, like a brook flowing ; it could speak as low as a man's voice, and it could go up, up, into trills and shakes, like a bird in the midst of a blue sky.

Then he bought a basket, not too large, not too small. It was that tall shape, used as a measure for grain : the bottom he filled with hay ; across it, half-way, he put a shelf, for a seat.

One day, while thus engaged, in the yard outside the stable, the woman passed : she stopped and watched him. Perroquet stood up, straightening his back, feeling almost guilty, yet defiant. The woman said nothing. She clasped her arms over her waist and nodded once or twice. She understood : she agreed. It was the best. Without a word she watched him for a long time with her level gaze after he had fallen to his work again : then she turned and walked heavily back to the house. Hili was sitting up at the table that evening for the first time, when they all had supper.

The sun rose later every day : its rays now seemed more feeble, falling on the hillsides where now only pines showed among the boulders, and on the cold sea, beginning already to toss up white heads. The fields where the peasants had dug, singing, were empty, ridged for the winter. The season's work was over ; the crops were in, the grain stored, and the animals safe from the cold.

From every farm in the country the hired men had been paid off and had gone away. Perroquet's departure was never questioned. He said good-bye to Jacob and to the kind merchant Cathariz. His own preparations, too, were complete : and with an inexpressible joy he fixed his eyes, after all these months of servitude, on the life that was to be his.

The first frosts had already arrived when he stood one morning at the farm-house door, making his adieux, grinning with pleasure. His money was in his pouch, his new flute under his belt, his new rolls of manuscript, in a thick leather wrapping, hung at his waist : a bright cotton scarf with diagonal lines of green and yellow

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adorned his neck : bread and cheese, an onion, and a bottle of curds were in his knapsack, packed by the woman : and on his back was strapped the basket, from which Hili's rosy face peeped out, exulting in the happy excitement of her elevation, and bobbing up and down.

"Come back soon," said the man. "Thou art a good worker. Come back soon. Come back next summer. We will pay thee better."

"My kind master," said Perroguet, suddenly humbled before the peasant. "You took me in, and fed me, and kept me. And the child also. What return could I give ; can I ever give ? Save, perhaps, to make you immortal, in a song ?"

"My man is right," said the woman evenly, who did not understand. "We paid thee so little, almost nothing. We have never had anyone who worked like thee. Some summer again thou wilt come, and the children shall play together. Madonna and saints guard thee, and thy child that brought me peace."

Her eyes were filled with a deep serenity. A knowledge of all life seemed to dwell calmly within their light.

She turned and went into the house and came out again immediately holding a little crucifix and a small wooden spoon. "Pray for me, Hili," she said to the baby. "Keep these always, they are from me, thy foster-mother." She thrust them into the child's hands and turned away.

With a leaping heart Perroguet marched down the road. When he came to the field where the kid had bleated he turned to look back. The woman was standing squarely before the threshold : her arm was on her husband's shoulder, and he supported her waist : entwined thus they seemed like a tree growing firmly out of their own soil. With her broad brown hand the woman shaded her eyes to see to the last, against the sun's dazzle, the dwindling figures.

CHAPTER XII

I

OF course, it was one of Perroguet's mistakes to take to the road when winter was coming on.

He did not think of this. The frost was sharp enough to make his blood tingle, the air was crisp and delicious : his energy seemed to swallow up at one glance the hills, the fields, and the long roads that would lie before him. His step struck a pleasant echo : at his shoulder Hili was clapping the two wooden objects together in an access of joy. Clop, clop, clippity, clop. He found himself whistling as he struck out on the road for the South.

If it was a mistake, Fate was looking the other way.

As they went South they kept in line with the milder weather. Never had life seemed so delightful or money easier to earn. Rumours of wars, battles, political upheavals, rattled through the country which still showed signs of the passing of the English, the Portuguese and the Spanish troops, and of Napoleon's rottigeurs and grenadiers : but these things, though near enough to stir people's feelings, to light their minds and imagination, so that they acted quickly and (which concerned Perroguet) gave generously, were not near enough to frighten, to numb, or to harden, as in the tragic scenes of the year before.

As for Hili, instead of being a care, she was actually an asset. Her little smiles charmed everybody. Queening it up there in the basket, she banged with her spoon on the edge, keeping in (or out of) time with his playing and forming a delightful impromptu duet : though occasionally he was obliged to object with firmness to some of her joyous improvisations. "No, mademoiselle, delightful

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to you though it may be, I cannot permit you to use the top of my head as a drum."

Hili would pout and look dreadfully hurt : Perroguet would take down the basket, and placing her before him, reason with her very seriously : in a moment a passing bird or a butterfly would enchant them both.

Wherever they travelled, everyone who caught sight of this couple wished to know all about them. Perroguet had a little story, pat. And as though making up for past misdemeanours, Hili would smile and nod gravely throughout this recital, as if she understood, and agreed with, every word.

People seldom failed to be touched. "What, no mother? Poor, beautiful, sweet, helpless, motherless baby! Give her a scudo, Cerno. . . . Give her a quarto, José. . . . Mama, Papa, do give that funny-looking gentleman with the darling baby on his back a dollar or two."

All the winter they stuck to the high roads, visiting towns and villages ; for the weather, as well as the child's tender years, made it necessary to find for every night some indoor shelter. Here, too, he was always lucky.

When Hili could toddle she romped by his side, hanging on to the torn cape which, out of sentiment, he had resumed. (It gave him also a battered and romantic look, contrasting finely with the gay striped scarf.) When tired she slept in the basket. She was still very light and Perroguet carried her easily. In the evenings he would teach her, with the most absorbed industry, the rudiments of language : she didn't understand one word of it, but she was fascinated by his earnest face grimacing in exaggerated oo's, aa's, ee's, and by the soothing and always beautiful quality of his voice. Something, however, she must have learned : for at last, when she spoke, it was no longer with the accent of a peasant. At night they kept each other warm, wrapped in the same blanket or under the same pallet of straw. "Some travelling musicians," Perroguet would muse

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gravely, "carry a dog with them to earn them money and to nestle in their arms at night for the sake of warmth. I am more fortunate." Then he would laugh at himself, and Hili would laugh too, and that would make him laugh all the more, because it was so obvious she couldn't really have seen any joke, and yet there she was chuckling away with the most comical expression: and at last he would let out a roar that would bring an angry voice to the wall asking if he wished to disturb all the guests in the posada, and the pigs and the horses as well? This would sober him up, and he and Hili would go to sleep as quiet as mice.

II

Yes, he was happy enough at that time, as month grew out of month and the pleasant days ended and renewed themselves.

But the following winter he was not so fortunate.

Secure in a feeling of good luck, as if now nothing he could do could be wrong, he had travelled without thought wherever his calling had seemed to lead him: so that it was a shock to him to discover one morning that he was much farther North than he had realised, with the beginning of winter upon him, the early frosts already set in, and dozens of miles of inhospitable country between him and kind skies.

Clearly there was nothing to be done but to set off at once in a southerly direction, and to hope to reach a town sufficiently large to give him work for some months (he remembered how he and Andrea had lain a winter in Madrid), or at least the chance of earning enough to buy his way farther. Yes, that was it. Set off at once. It would be some time yet before the worst cold came on.

Alas, the very next day was bitter, with a tearing wind: he bowed his head against it, striving to protect Hili. There was nothing to alarm one in a single cold day, one or two often appeared long before the real winter, just as a spring day suddenly flowered, often, long before the snows were finished. It was merely, as it were, a

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sort of reminder, or a warning. Well, it was all right, he was warned, he was taking steps. . . . "Thank you, sir, for the kindly hint, it has been noted, now you can go away."

But the wind did not go away. Next day it was worse than ever, bearing before it whirling sheaves of rain. 'This is awkward indeed,' thought Perroguet. At first he sheltered himself under trees, but the wind swept the rain around them, and shook down the water from the branches: the two were not kept any drier and they were only wasting time; after the whole morning he had advanced no more than one league.—This was useless. 'I must stride out,' he thought, 'the next village, I am sure, is over that crest—it looks far, but is doubtless nearer than it seems, rain dulls everything: if we get wet, why, we get wet: we shall take off all our things and dry them before a peat-fire in the evening. Yes, if I step out, we should reach that village by nightfall.'

He left his shelter and advanced boldly along the middle of the road, which was already beginning to resemble a bog. The wet mud, growing deeper each minute, clung to his shoes, retarding his progress, the water within them squelched at each step and squirted out at the seams. Hili shifted in her basket. The wind lifted its leather hood at the corners, as if in order to pour in the rain: the water running through the wicker descended in a chilly stream down Perroguet's back. 'Well, one can't be wetter than wet,' he thought, yet he was uneasy for the child. As fast as he could he plodded on.

Just as they reached the crest a fury seemed to seize the elements; the wind screamed over the tops of the rocks, the rain lashed them with a sound of drums. Their wet black faces gleamed in the dull light, a hundred rivulets sprang and bubbled in their crevices. Here, indeed, he looked anxiously around for shelter: but there was no shelter on that exposed height. With the greatest difficulty he traversed it: the driving wefts obscured the scene, but somewhere below, he was sure, lay the village. To-

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wards this he set his thoughts, striving to force his way through the storm.

Darkness was coming on as he descended the slope : the wind had dropped, but the rain continued unabated. Eagerly he searched the distances for lights or buildings. ‘ Perhaps I mustn’t expect them yet,’ he thought. ‘ It is so difficult to walk in the rain and darkness that I cannot have gone so far as I suppose.’ In this mood he passed mile after mile. At last he wondered whether he had missed the way. This very unpleasant thought, continually recurring, finally enthroned itself as an established fact.

It was now pitch-black with a clouded sky, and Perroguet was tired out. It was quite useless, he knew, to wander any farther. They must spend the night where they were. No peat-fire for them, no comforting meal. The rain now had ceased, but too late : they were drenched to the skin. He searched the dark horizon for any hope : on the left, against a lesser blackness, showed the faint smudge of trees.

Feeling quite an old campaigner, Perroguet plunged into this forest of pines, hoping to find therein a little dryness and shelter. Here he was not disappointed : and by scraping away the surface layer of pine-needles, a soft and fairly dry bed was made for Hili, who was already fast asleep. Her sodden clothing looked deplorable. He managed to get a small fire alight among the needles, but in the general dampness it could not blaze, though it served to keep away the worst of the cold.

The next morning, very early, he left the wood : and retracing his steps, managed, about midday, to discover the village of his search—a few houses, no more, by the roadside. Here a meal refreshed them, and their clothes having dried upon their bodies, it seemed advisable to waste no more time but to continue their journey, making sure, this time, of their route, and hoping for better weather.

But every day the cold grew more intense. Snow fell during the night, and with a sudden icy grip the frost

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seized everything. Winter advanced upon the country with a deadly speed never before witnessed : within a week the whole of its power was developed. Perroquet could go no more than a few miles each day, the snow lay so thickly. Yet he must continue : to stay was to starve.

It was clear too, now, that the child was ill. Ever since that night in the wood she had seemed unlike herself : she was flushed, restless, irritable. Her fretful cry, at first angry and demanding, now grew weaker. She could not walk : at last she could hardly hold up her head in the basket on his back. Yet he had to carry her with him, he could not leave her long in any place, however kindly the people (though the cruel weather shut most of their doors), for after an hour or two in any case there was no more to be earned. On some days, too, she seemed a little better : then he would hope again and struggle on : and strive to defeat the despairing anxiety that pursued him.

"Courage, Hili. One more week, my darling, and we shall be on the other side of the hill, as they say, where the sun shines. One more piece of savage country to traverse, and then : you shall see : we shall be warm again, your roses will come back, we shall laugh once more."

It was savage indeed. Their path now led for miles through wild forests and crags that showed no sign of human habitation. A belt of cold, more intense than anywhere else, seemed to have been laid upon it. Perroquet gritted his teeth and set his course across this waste.

In the afternoon they entered a dark wood.

'How could I ever have liked woods ?' he wondered. 'I have always known in my heart they are places of evil spirits and of fear.' The snow, lying deeply everywhere, encircled the pine-trunks that rose sharply black against it, their network of tiny twigs keeping out what light there was in the sky.

In this greyness it was difficult to trace the little path whose course showed only as a winding gap between the

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trees. Nothing underfoot marked it : if any had gone before the snow had long since covered up the tracks. It lay now, smooth as a sheet, save where it was piled in soft drifts against the boles of trees, or where a deep cushion marked the presence, underneath, of shrub or boulder. Upon this surface nothing was seen, not even the footprints of bird or rabbit : but just beside a cleft in the ground where a stream once ran, now frozen solid in its course, there lay the dead body of a weasel. Stiffly stretched out, no more than fur on bones, it spoke in itself the story of the treachery of the forest. This little death shocked Perroquet ; it recalled witch-tales of his youth ; he turned away sharply lest Hili should see it.

The snow, as he turned, slid under him. This noiseless movement seemed to hold something furtive and menacing. 'Do you threaten me ?' he thought. 'Do you tell me how easily you can make a grave for Skyline? Do you remind me that she is ill, perhaps dying? Do you triumph, being aware already that before night I may be lost, that I shall sink in you, that you will close quietly over us both ?'

He struck out again for what appeared to be the path. The baby, light as she was, seemed a difficult burden. He had to grope beforehand with his stick for each step hold. The cold nipped him to the marrow. "Art thou cold, little one ?" he asked the child. She was too weak to answer, even with a whimper. He had wrapped round her already all he had that gave warmth.

The trees seemed to whisper among themselves as if they answered his question ; their little twigs rustled, sometimes their arms struck each other with a dry crack, a load of snow fell without sound to the earth. The light seemed already fainter and tinged with purple.

"Let me get through this forest by daylight," prayed Perroquet. He plodded on inexhaustibly. "I cannot fail here, surely I cannot fall here, and die, I who have surmounted the terrors of a campaign ?"

He looked around him through the trees fearfully. In the failing light, as he advanced, the trunks seemed to

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shift amongst themselves, the farther ones criss-crossed against the near ones, as if with a movement of their own. If he stood, suddenly, to betray them, they stopped moving too, on the same instant. It made you feel you were being watched—every action, furtively, silently, *watched* by unseen eyes. . . . It made you want to shout, to yell a defiance! . . . You didn't, because you feared the echo, you feared the mocking smiles of the trees, and above all the silence that would come after, deeper than ever. . . . In the war he had had at least companions. Here, he was alone, with a dying child, among the unknown spirits of the wood. . . . He thought sharply of that moonlit glade where he had walked with Andrea. Then he had seemed to see spirits floating half-way up the tree-trunks, peeping round them, grinning with a sound of bells. Now he knew better. The spirits of the wood would be dark shapes, crouching on the snow.

A cold shudder stirred the roots of his spine. It trembled outward through his limbs, breaking on the surface into a chilly sweat. Suddenly a hand whipped across his face, like the flash of a snake. A stinging stripe leapt from temple to cheek, blinding him with pain, and followed at once by the icy impact of snow. He stumbled, from the shock of that whipping branch, raising his arm in defence: and then he looked forward: and in that moment he uttered a cry, riven with terror, that spread, vibrating, among the dry trunks of the trees.

Over there, in the snow, where the path turned, was a dark shape, crouching. Perroquet could not move. He clung to his staff, rooted before him in the snow: his heart hammering in his head. He could feel the hot drops of sweat falling upon his clenched hands. His eyes lost all in the world but that dreaded enemy, waiting for its next movement. But the dark shape did not move.

After an infinite time the grip of fear relaxed, it ebbed away in waves, fainter and fainter: the hammering subsided: a normal vision showed again only the trees

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and the snow, with a darkness upon it, whose outline gradually defined itself.

It was human. He could see clothing. That was a blanket-cloak spread out on the snow, the frayed edge towards him. That was a boot, sticking out and shining. It was a man, a wayfarer, resting for a moment on the pathside.

A flood of relief welled through him. And happiness too, and gratitude. Here was a companion, the saints be thanked, to share the rest of the journey, to keep up one's heart with ; he was bound to be going the same way, there was only one way out of this accursed wood. And how fortunate to have met him here, just as he was feeling —well, of course it was ridiculous to have imagined it could have been anything else : still, with a companion one can chat, whistle, talk of the bad winter : one can keep the dark woods at bay. . . .

All this time, over the crumbling and slippery surface, Perroguet came nearer. His heart fell a little as he approached. The poor traveller seemed overcome, perhaps with fatigue or cold, he had fainted and fallen, perhaps at that very moment. How lucky that a rescuer should arrive, just then, just in time, before the night came on, otherwise he might easily have had to spend it alone in the forest. And what a foolish way to lie. . . . A young man, a boy, he was lying with his face in the snow.

Perroguet put the baby down carefully against a tree-trunk. He knelt beside the boy, breathing kind words of succour, and turned him over gently. It was difficult, the snow had already buried him a little, his garments crackled as the small icy bonds that laced them broke, one by one. Stiff as a log of wood, he rolled over.

The face was dark, framed in black locks upon the snow : it was sharply outlined, pinched with starvation, yet touchingly youthful ; and touchingly familiar. It was Sebastian.

It was quite a long time before Perroguet could believe that he was dead.

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Without a word he lay there, Sebastian : and Perroguet heard the boy's bright voice, the tale of his father and his home, he saw at once the picture of all that he must have thought, felt, suffered, before he fell like this, in the snow. Silently he lay there, his eyes open, looking up into the sky that had not pitied him.

The forest seemed to creep into itself, to watch, breathless, the effect on the man of the boy it had killed. Nothing stirred in that silence : only the intense cold of frost spread slowly, closing round the three : the boy, the man, and the sick child. Then from behind the tree-trunks came a little snuffle-snuffle.

Perroguet was too numbed with distress for any more fear. He looked up quietly.

Suki came limping out from behind the tree to which she was tied. At the end of the cord she turned, and limped back. As soon as she saw Perroguet she stopped ; she stared at him and sat down at once on her haunches.

"If you had but waited, Sebastian !" cried Perroguet. "Two days, my friend. Perhaps one day, even. Could nothing have told you I would be passing ? We could have braved the forest together, in safety. Why do I meet you if I am to meet you too late ? Could no one have told me you were dying, here, alone ? "

He rose from his knees. The snow had drenched them. They were aching with cold. It was strange that though he rose Sebastian stayed stiff and silent, only settling a little deeper into the snow. "You have triumphed indeed," he said to the noiseless waste. "A grand, clever triumph, this of yours." He stopped, startled by his own thoughts, trembling. The memory of Douglas swept upon him. 'Is there a curse upon *me*?' he wondered. 'Is it my destiny, when a friend needs me, one whom I would gladly help, to arrive always too late ?'

The consciousness of the bear's presence began to stir in his mind. As well as he could, with his numbed hands, he loosed the knots that tied her to the tree. The bones of her hips stuck out under her coarse fur, a white shurr

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of snow clung to her underside ; red weals had formed between her toes, whose nails were split with the frost. Slanting across her black nose was a terrible crack where the flesh had been eaten away by the freezing metal of her nose-ring. All round the tree the snow was darkened with shavings of bark she had scratched from the trunk. Her face looked very small, but her glittering brown eyes seemed larger than ever and they did not leave Perroguet. When he came near she rose unsteadily to her feet, and as soon as he had untied her, she thrust her cold muzzle into his hand.

" You must follow me," he said to her wearily. " I cannot lead you. I have the basket."

He took up his staff again and turning away from Sebastian he hoisted the child once more on his back. He felt he did not care what happened to Suki. Why should the bear live when its master died ?

As if she understood and sympathised with his resentment, Suki, swaying a little from faintness, trotted in his tracks quietly, without giving trouble.

The forest was darker than ever now, and the path just as difficult to find, but that short wheezy snuffle at his ankles and the warm breath blowing upon them gradually brought him a sense of comfort and companionship. After all, the bear was not such a bad creature. Her worst crimes, Sebastian had said, were vanity and frivolity. Well, she had had a taste of the grim realities of life now, poor thing. He turned in his traces, leaning on his staff, resting for a moment, in order to observe the changes wrought in her by this experience.

At this, Suki stopped dead in the path behind him, looking up apologetically, as if fearing a reprimand was in the air. With a deliberate effort she ceased her snuffle, and in an exaggerated and lady-like fashion raised her paw to her nose. " Pray forgive me, dear sir. It is not the best manners, I quite agree. My master taught me better, I assure you. He, ma foi ! he would never have permitted it ! But you see, I am not quite myself. Besides, I have a cold."

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At these words so plainly uttered without sound, Perroguet felt a grin spreading of its own accord across his cheek. "After all," he thought kindly, "it is not her fault Sebastian is dead." By the time they reached the end of the wood he had forgiven her for surviving him.

They came to the hamlet just before nightfall. It was wretchedly poor: the inhabitants, like everyone else, half starving in this memorable winter. He knocked on the door of the biggest hut.

"Can you tell me of anyone who could give me shelter for the night and food? We have travelled far and are spent."

"Food? For how many? It is scarce here."

"Oh, just enough to feed myself, my child, and my bear."

"*Bear?* You must be mad. Who would feed a bear? It would eat you, rather. Go elsewhere with your fairy-tales. I cannot stay in the cold wind listening to them."

Eventually he managed to buy sufficient food for them all and the offer of a room to sleep in. Here they settled, cosily enough, along with the owner and his four children. Suki's manners were superb, combining an elegant dignity with a modest self-effacement. She ate her nuts with the utmost neatness, not gobbling up the pine-kernels first, as a lesser bear would have done, or scattering the shells all over the floor.

Perroguet fed her with a great pleasure, he felt he was feeding Sebastian. . . . All at once, in the midst of this thought, an overwhelming presentiment seized him: its power was such that his whole body shook, tears were forced out of his eyes. Something, he knew not what, opened before him, a scene in a life he had lived or would live; a sense of frustration, of unutterable despair, and yet of tragic comfort; of tending that which was left because the other was lost. . . . With this strange, smarting, unbidden picture in his mind he began to pour the warm fat over the wounds in Suki's feet. Sud-

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denly, with a pounding heart, in a panic he could not understand, he rushed across the little room to look at Hili, sleeping on the floor. Yes, she was quite safe.

Next morning they set off again, the three. The villages were nearer now, the main road to the South was under their feet, and as they went the extreme severity of the cold began to relax. Suki made herself a very agreeable companion. She realised very well what she owed to Perroguet, and it seemed as if she set about consoling him in the only way she knew. In spite of his sorrow over the loss of her master, her antics amused him incessantly.

Hili took to her at once. It appeared as if her coming had even made a little change in the child's health. Perroguet considered adopting the bear too. Surely she could be useful; somehow? Perhaps she could carry the basket of Hili strapped on her back? No—for in any case, as soon as Hili was well she would need the basket no more. Let her ride, then, on the bear. Yes, what a fine procession, enough to take the hearts of any town; himself first, in his striped scarf, fluting a stirring tune, the bear in his wake shambling along, in a brave shiny collar and harness, and Hili on her back, very upright, perhaps playing a little drum. . . . A thousand happy variations sprang before him. . . .

But, alas, it became evident within a very short time that Suki, however charming in herself, presented a problem. Her keep alone taxed too much his slender resources, for besides her food (and her appetite since her recent starvation was enormous), he had to pay extra merely for the privilege of tying her up in a stable or to a tree. "You never knew what harm a queer beast like that would be doing," people said, pocketing the money. A few of Sebastian's difficulties began to be apparent. Perroguet reluctantly faced the position: between them all they had nothing but his earnings. A baby only, or a bear only, yes: but both, impossible, in a year like this.

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Yet what could he do? Suki could not be deserted once again. Yet who wants a bear?

Thus he brooded, sitting one evening in a poor hut whose partial use he had hired from an old woman at an extortionate price. Three filthy grandchildren played on the floor, looking fearfully through their matted locks upon the monster: who, in turn, regarded them with contempt. "I, at least, have the sense to catch my own lice," she seemed to be saying. The crone crouched in the centre, in the midst of the sharp peat-smoke, stirring a thin broth, eyeing the strangers with envy, and cackling incessantly.

"Fear nothing, my son," said the old woman at last, reading his thoughts. "My daughter's husband is a fancier of animals. He catches all kinds, especially bears, and sells them to all the famous showmen; to the fairs; to the circuses. Just leave your beast here, it need hamper you no more, my daughter's husband will dispose of it for you. Perhaps, even (he has a kind heart), he will not charge you very much for his services."

"Pray let him not inconvenience himself," replied Perroquet, who did not believe her. "I can sell it myself, in that case." He knew quite well the old woman would have cooked the bear to feed her family as soon as his back was turned.

Nevertheless, it was clearly an idea. He made enquiries now of all he met as to whether there were, in the neighbourhood, any circus-people, or trainers of animals, resting during the winter.

What a relief, and at the same time a sadness, to part with Suki! "It would be useless to try to give you away, my dear young lady," he said, looking into her intelligent eyes: "it would be supposed that you bit, or carried the plague. No, no one would have you as a gift! But a nice, exorbitant sum, reluctantly reduced, step by step—yes, that will give you the air of a good bargain and a valuable property; and will bring you also good care always from your owner."

In less than three weeks he had sold Suki, with many

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recommendations as to character and promises of kind treatment, to a hearty young man with excellent teeth and gold ear-rings, who shared a green caravan and a couple of striped tents with a mixture of human and animal society, and who seemed delighted to have her.

"Suki, what a ridiculous name!" he exclaimed. "All bears have been called Pierrot since the North Pole was discovered."

"But this is—er—a *lady*-bear," explained Perroguet diffidently. Under Suki's calm gaze it seemed indelicate to say "female."

"That makes no difference at all." The young man hitched his supple shoulders and pulled out a coil of rope from under a shelf. "Come hither, Pierrot Thickhead, come and be tied up! I see you have a ring in your nose, an absurdly small one. A stout rope round the neck and shoulder is more serviceable. See, I am not taking any risks. No handing over good money and then finding the purchase has walked home during the night! Here, stupid creature, learn this, you live here in future. And remember, strict obedience from the first moment!" He flicked her nose roughly.

This authoritative tone alarmed Perroguet considerably: it was not at all what Suki was used to, and he feared the show of her natural indignation might lose him his bargain.

To his surprise she trotted up with a meek contentment. She gazed, entranced, at the brutal young man with the gold ear-rings. Almost coyly she offered her neck. When she was tied she looked about, sniffed once or twice, and then sat down, folding her paws in a ladylike manner. There was no question that she was pleased with her new quarters.

"I expect she can tell," thought Perroguet.

He was still anxious about Hili, whose return to health had not been continued: there were several weeks of winter yet before them, and Lisbon was still many leagues away.

CHAPTER XIII

I

THEN one day, suddenly, it is spring.

The sun shines, the birds chatter, the child recovers. The joy is unspeakable. The whole fountain of Nature seems bursting from its source. The month of February scatters its gifts upon the plain of Lisbon.

It is the beginning of the orange harvest. Like golden worlds they hang, enormous and glowing, among the glossy dark leaves, symbolising the season of splendour. Whole valleys are filled with their green and gold : within their shade, where their scent lingers, keen and yet sweet, myriads of tiny, brilliant wings dart and cross : a humming insect-note whirrs about them continually. The sun, suddenly warm, draws from the blossoming shrubs and trees a fragrance which is wafted everywhere. Flowers rush from the ground, opening their petals within a few hours, drinking the sunshine and giving it again in colours and shapes ever more intricate and dazzling : a living carpet, they cover the brown soil. A little breeze drifts at no great height, fluttering the draperies at balconies, turning over the orange leaves. There are floating baths on the Tagus, the waves lap-lap crisply blue, not yet soiled nor tepid from the advancing year : here, from the shores, the people bathe in fresh tidal water. At the edge all day long is a foam and froth of bathers : plunging, laughing, splashing, clad only in shining bronze. Hili tumbles in this flood. Her little body is well made : each day's sunshine brings it added strength. Perroguet watches her with pride as she jumps up and down, kicking the water about. Lying down at the edge, he lets the cool water flow over him, he is quite buried beneath it :

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suddenly with a tremendous splash he rolls over like a fish. Hili shrieks with delight. Then she is put ashore to dry in the sun, while Perroguet swims out into the slapping ripples of the tide. Not for long, though, the day's work must not be forgotten: also, they must buy some dinner.

Dressed again, cooled and yet glowing, their hair still wet, and curling in the breeze, they wander hand-in-hand to the market. Here they buy fruit and bread, eating it then and there, sitting in the shade on some upturned barrel or empty crate, swinging their legs and watching the busy scene.

Fruit-sellers are the noisiest, naturally, their wares are perishable. Figs, oranges, melons and peaches are on sale everywhere. Their brilliant heaps stud the squares like pyramids of sunshine. The whole market is a constant shifting of lights, colours, groups of movement. The eye picks them out with delight as they glint and change, gather meaning, strike a memory, hold for a moment a suggestion, and dissolve. English, German, Spanish, and Portuguese soldiers and officers, their distinctive uniforms carried with the same firm swagger, as if all soldiers had one mother: priests in scarlet cloaks moving suavely among the stalls; English sailors, all eyes, with their pigtails and shining black hats; chefs and major-domos of noble families pompous in their green or white stockings and the badge of their master: Greek sailors in red caps and wide, short, white trousers: Algerians and Tunisians, darkly tanned, in turbans and velvet waistcoats embroidered in coloured silks, with gaudy yellow slippers of Morocco leather on their glistening brown feet: donkeys laden to the sky with bright green lettuces: beggars, tumblers, cheap-jacks, ballad-singers. Amid this throng the monks and priests drive a good trade. One bears in a casket the finger-bones of a Saint whose intermission for forgiveness of their sins can be purchased at an absurdly small sum by all passers-by: one carries a doll resembling that Brunswickian bought long ago from Andrea by Father Dolin; it is now

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enclosed in a cardboard box to which a glass front has been fitted, and a cloth, draped over it, is embroidered with holy emblems : for one vintem a view of it may be obtained, for two permission to kiss the glass front. The priests gather a good harvest from the faithful. Now and then the bell from the Cathedral and now and then the boom of a gun echoes under the clear air.

The sky and the air are of a clarity unimaginable. Day after day the crystal holds, unbroken.

It is easy to sing, to tell tales, to laugh, in this weather. Kindliness and prosperity flow everywhere. Somebody asks Perroguet into his house. The cement floor has been newly sprinkled with water, so it is cool : dried lavender is burning in every room. The host is talkative and intelligent. He is delighted to find a new ear for his discourses. In return for Perroguet's old-fashioned songs he tells him the very latest news of Napoleon. For it appears that Napoleon, a father since his marriage with Marie-Louise, has not relinquished his lust for conquest : on the contrary, as if spurred to fresh efforts, having occupied Holland, he has all but succeeded in his project of an invasion of Portugal. "Ah, my friend, what a disaster. Can you conceive it ? How anxiously we watched, as victory gave herself alternately, within our neighbour's borders, to the French and the English arms ! " Perroguet hears the details of the terrible siege of Lerida : of the siege of Ciudad Roderigo, of the siege and treacherous surrender of Badajos, both gallantly retrieved at last by the brave and glorious Wellington, to the extreme fury of the French Emperor. How, foiled in his attempt on this peninsula, the insatiable monster appears to meditate attack on another quarter : Russia, this time, far enough away for everyone to breathe again in peace. "Yes, these are wonderful times we live in : no one hereafter will witness such splendour and terror."

And Perroguet agrees : the sense of terror and splendour add zest to a life that is wholly delightful.

The little girl grows swiftly in happiness and beauty. She can speak fluently, not lisping like some children ;

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her great delight is to scamper at his side singing over and over some melody she has just picked up, or gathering the flowers and naming them after her own fashion. Sometimes they look like days of the week, sometimes they resemble the faces of people they have seen in their wanderings. A long line of changing faces reaches back into her mind from her earliest memory, they come out from behind doors, they stare from crowds, they speak from the backs of horses, all dressed differently, all strangers to each other. Only Perro's face is always the same.

One day they sit, eating, by a little pool. The sunshine falls through the trees in greeny-golden flakes, the bread and the fruit are delicious. Scooping some twigs into a hollow between two stones, Perroguet boils eggs in a little pan with the clear pool water. Fish, the colour of ripples, flash over the gravel at the bottom, on the surface a bright weed floats, whose leaves are shaped like spears. A spring flows into the stream, flooding the pool: the banks, starred with a small blue flower, overhang the water. The spring enters through the moss, underground, unseen; only its happy watery voices mark its presence, and the incessant bubbles that form, swing downstream, and burst at the corner. A glitter shot with the rainbow lights this tireless journey.

"Oh, Perro, *Perro*, see, there comes one as large as a fig. Oh, bigger, far bigger, a melon. Oh, beauty."

Will it burst on a stone? Will it catch on that little sharp one? Will it wreck on that treacherous twig, the grave of so many? Oh, look, look! Or will it swing safe, reach at least the corner, beyond which is no hope?

This is a very important moment. Breaths are checked, mouths open, hands bearing food are transfixated in mid-air.

To the intense satisfaction of both watchers, the bubble, with superb aplomb, rides the rapids, negotiates the corner, and can actually be seen triumphant in mid-stream retreating undaunted into the distance. The brightest currents of joy flood the heart at this exhilarating and unparalleled spectacle.

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They lie on their backs, filled with contentment, looking up through the laced boughs.

"Why is the sky so big, Perro?"

"To wrap the world in."

II

Sometimes they left the roads, and stepped out across the country. Even in the wilder parts the earth was warm and kindly. Between the pines and cork-trees glowed the massed colours and dark foliage of hundreds of living things. The valleys and plains were filled with rock-roses, lavender, rosemary, strawberries, wild roses, and blossoming brambles of all kinds. A whole hillside was a sheet of flowers among which the vast granite boulders lay, grey and cool.

The rock-rose, the rosemary, the myrtle and the lavender provided fuel for their fires; burning under the cooking-pot, they spread a piercing fragrance into the air. Sometimes it was amusing to light a fire in a hollowed-out cork-tree. The hollow was the fireplace and the tree the chimney: if damp with decay it did very well and never caught wholly alight. At other times the fire was built in the open with due regard to the wind. Perroquet was always careful, in starting a fire, to show Hili the necessity of doing this *slowly*: thus the lizards, the toads, the beetles, and even the snakes, had time to rush out and escape. If you spared them in this way they would never harm you afterwards. Scorpions were more difficult: they lay under cool stones by day and walked abroad at night, you had to be careful that they did not sting you with their wicked black tails, in which the venom hung, shining and yellow like a drop of honey. Yet even this was simple, once you knew the manner of it. For you only had to scatter wood-ash in a ring around your sleeping-place and you were absolutely safe, since no scorpion would cross over it. For this is how it was with scorpions, they were not wholly evil, they had reverence, and they had caution: they never could tell, scorpions as they were (whose ancestors had dwelt on Calvary), whether or no

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the wood-ashes were not come from the True Cross. Certainly it was permissible to take advantage of the ignorance of scorpions.

Indeed, it was soon learnt of snakes, spiders and scorpions: none are so bad as they are imagined to be. A sort of friendliness or at least good-fellowship might exist even with mosquitoes, ants and flies. Perroguet was quite particular on this, and Hili understood him readily: and many delightful friendships were formed in consequence.

For Hili's nights Perroguet had a fine, luxurious arrangement. Having acquired, somehow, a piece of sacking, he stretched it horizontally, about six inches above the ground, by tying the ends to four firmly planted sticks, the space between sheet and ground being stuffed with dry grass and herbs. This made a superb bed, clean, warm, free from underdraughts and ground-dews, and supremely portable, for sticks were found anywhere. He had once made one for himself too, but his weight tore it through at the knots, he had to make it up smaller and smaller, finally it was no more than a chair, and even this was at last regretfully abandoned. He slept as before on the soil.

Sometimes they travelled along the coast, where the rocks and the sand were so burning with the sun that everyone who walked barefooted had to paddle incessantly in the foam to cool themselves: while the very surface of the sea reflected the sun's rays so strongly that they were almost suffocated with its torrid glamour and glare.

After this, how delightful to move inland, to lie under an orange-tree that was slowly dripping blossom: to observe each hour yielding its own pleasant or curious interest.

Lying thus one day, leaning on his elbow, watching the dappled shadow sway over the grass as the breeze moved the branches, flicking pebbles carelessly at an old tree-trunk, and listening to a little odd tune in his own head, Perroguet was galvanised to behold suddenly an enormous

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green lizard rush out from the decayed roots of this tree and attack his shoe with the utmost ferocity. The red spots on its body glowed like angry eyes : its own eyes were alight with savage vigour and defiance. Its horns stood up like the towered gates of a city ; and since the beast was nearly eighteen inches long, the sight of its repeated onslaughts was impressive in the extreme. Finding that all its efforts made no impression, the stranger's rage gave way to curiosity. In quick, nervous movements it advanced, exploring the whole peninsula of Perroguet's body : while at the slightest sign of movement (or, as it might be, of insubordination), on Perroguet's part, a renewed attack was threatened. Its long, fierce face, its heroic though useless courage, tickled Perroguet enormously : in both, the striking resemblance to the gallant Spanish Commander was unmistakable.

Castanos soon became a great pet and favourite. His genius for adaptability rapidly displayed itself ; he learnt to come forward at a whistle, to take food neatly out of a hand, and to exchange a fold in an old cloak for a hollowed tree, as a home. He would lie for hours on a stone in the hot sun feeling himself warmed through and through, and letting Hili tickle his back with a stick : when she touched a spot at the base of his spine as if in an ecstasy he would roll over and offer his belly. This was called Dying for Spain and King Ferdinand. He showed equal intelligence when called upon to display the defeat of the Napoleonic armies : for when a stick was scraped quickly from side to side in the sand before him he would rush upon it, the gallant Castanos, and with the utmost élan capture the whole thing, biting it into several pieces. But what showed the true inner greatness and liberal-mindedness (as Perroguet never failed to point out) of this cold-blooded but warm-hearted reptile, was the way he would, whenever required, die for the Emperor Napoleon, or attack the enemies of France, with equal readiness and enthusiasm. These, and many other accomplishments, delighted them all : and in addition the brave General, whose curiosity as to any

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new thing purchased on their travels, particularly the contents of the knapsack, never flagged, rewarded his companions in the evenings by catching the midges which otherwise would have tormented them. Thus things went (Perroquet being delighted that Hili should have a friend nearer, as he felt, her own size and age) until, one fine morning, Castanos produced a shining, circular batch of eggs, and looking up anxiously into each of their faces in turn, tried to explain that now she would have to give up roving and lead a steady, household life.

Well, they couldn't carry eggs about, as well as a lizard; so with mutual regret they had to part. Perroquet was sorry. Hili had no child-friends. The manner of her life was to blame, and one unfortunate incident.

For, some weeks before, on the edge of the road, Hili had found a fallen bird's-egg. The shell was cracked: within, life had already begun to form. In wonder she held it in her hand: some bright scarlet drops, streaked with gold, began to emerge. At that moment, from the other side of the tree, two boys appeared, town-boys, on holiday. They peered into her hand at her find with a curiosity that instantly turned to loathing. "Drop it, you nasty little girl! Pah! It is too disgusting. You must indeed be a filthy village child like the ones our mothers told us never to play with." Hili's face turned perfectly white. Perroquet sprang to her side. "Nothing is disgusting, nothing!" he cried to her in a sort of swift agony. He was afraid she would feel hurt, ashamed, bitterly wounded. . . . But Hili was looking after her detractors who were continuing their search for their prey on the shrubs. The caterpillar, a huge privet-hawk moth, wound itself among the leaves. With a scraping pounce they boxed it: their cries of triumph were shrill: their delighted greed did not notice the green stain slowly spreading on the cardboard that showed the prisoner had been mortally wounded. But Hili saw it: all the forces of her nature seemed to rush together into a hatred of these slayers: with one swift movement she flung the broken egg straight at the couple. It marked with Cain's

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brand the forehead of the nearest. They both yelled angrily, thinking it a low, vulgar revenge.

Hili's face was scarlet ; it was the first time in her life she had committed a violent action, her fists were clenched, her chest heaving. Suddenly, turning to Perroquet, she burst into tears.

It was this that had kept her aloof from strange children for a long time afterwards.

III

By November they were back in Lisbon.

From every part of the country people were flocking into the Capital, in view of the great events which it was hoped were shortly to take place there. Perroquet prudently decided to be among the first of the stream, and thus be sure of lodgings for the winter : his recent alarms with Hili in the frosts were not to be repeated.

The city looked very different now from when they had last seen it. Freed from the spell of spring, Lisbon showed herself like a drab, whose toilsome trade overcomes her care of beauty. For a moment she wears the gay cloak the year has bought for her, soon it is tarnished and thrown aside, the ancient slut is revealed.

Poverty, dirt, riches and ugliness flourished as before, side by side, but more observably, under the tired sky, which emphasised also the accumulated refuse of the summer that only the rain would wash away from the streets and squares. A smell that never lessened or varied hung in every corner of the city ; all day corpses of the poor were exposed at doors waiting for charity to buy them burial : all day only the warning cry "*Aqua vai !*" (by law thrice repeated) heralded the descent from windows of every kind of filth into the streets. This was the practice that had so scandalised Junot into the ordering of the cleansing of the whole city, and the destruction of the thousands of diseased dogs that preyed upon its refuse : the British, however, observing the intense indignation caused by this violent outrage to public feelings, had on their arrival humanely restored to Lisbon her

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ancient customs and privileges. So that now the streets, unlighted, save where a casual lamp or taper burned before some effigy of a Saint, were infested, as in the good old days, with filth, robbers, and mangy and half-starved mongrels, to the Portuguese joy and gratification. The dogs, too, were pleased.

Among these streets, below balconies, outside hospederias, wherever he could, dodging the evil bucket-loads from above, Perroguet sang, earning no more than a few handfuls of coppers. A living of greater security would be welcome to him, he felt, at this time. But it was difficult, without influence impossible, to get a post in any orchestra, whatever the extent of one's musical knowledge. What bandmaster would even look at a strolling player? Yet in this he was fortunate, and in an unexpected manner.

Going home rapidly one evening, just as dusk was coming on, with little in his pocket and thinking gloomily of his fortunes, he was suddenly confronted by a very drunk, very dirty man, reeling in the midst of the narrow lane and striking about him right and left. "Out of my way, devils!" roared this ruffian, giving Perroguet a blow on the shoulder that sent him staggering. He put his hand under his filthy cloak, and dragging out a doll dressed as the Virgin, he pushed it against Perroguet's face. "Kiss, for one vintem!" he cried savagely. Perroguet thrust the doll away: it stank of the wine that had fallen upon it: the man raised his fist, half turning, to pin Perroguet against the wall. That instant the click-clack of heels took his attention: a lady, followed by her duenna, came along the passage. Her black lace mantle was clasped under her chin in the orthodox manner by two fingers of her left hand, the other held a fan shielding her face. "Kiss, for one vintem!" shouted the man. He tore the mantilla aside, thrusting the doll behind it, the fan fell to the cobbles, the duenna shrieked. From the wall Perroguet sprang forward, striking with all his weight. The man lurched over at once, and sprawled, a great heap, on the cobbles, his head and the doll in

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the gutter, where presently his surfeit flowed over it. He was safe, at least, for some time.

After this it was natural that Perroguet should lend the ladies the assistance of his presence to the end of the passage, and indeed as far as the door of their dwelling ; and even more natural that the lady should be interested in Hili (who had witnessed the whole scene with the roundest eyes), so prettily fair, so different from a Spanish child ; and most natural of all that Perroguet should enliven the journey with conversational remarks that soon disclosed to his companions his position and profession, his fears and ambitions.

The Fidalgo's house, in the Square of the Roscio, formerly part of the Offices of the Inquisition, was lofty and imposing in a Saracenic style, with tall windows over the balconies. At its door Perroguet would have parted : but a sign from the ladies detained him. Sure enough, in a moment or two, a servant in green sleeves opened the door again, with a request from the master of the house that the stranger should step within.

They passed through a patio and up some stairs to a chamber which gave on the balcony, whence the whole family was accustomed to watch for hours the affairs of the streets. Within this chamber it was very dark : the light coming through the coloured panes of glass glimmered faintly on the rich tapestry on the wall, the heavily brocaded couches and chairs, and the curious ornaments —one, a horse's tail twisted into a festoon, and fixed to the wall with hooks. To overpower the nauseating smell arising from the streets, vases of perfume stood about everywhere.

Here, with the greatest observances of ceremony, the Fidalgo entered, and received him. With a great many lengthy and complimentary speeches he thanked the stranger for his services ; explaining that his wife was a Spanish lady, not accustomed to the usages of Lisbon, otherwise she would not have ventured so far without a male escort ; and, reiterating his indebtedness, finally expressed his desire to be of any service to the musician.

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"I am well known as a patron of arts," he said, smiling gravely, "not only in the principal galleries but also at the Opera and in the theatre of San Carlos. A word from me to any manager would find you, doubtless, a place of some sort in any orchestra."

Perroquet was overwhelmed. "I cannot thank you, sir, sufficiently, for the honour you do me, and the confidence you appear to repose in my skill. As to that, I hope I may say, with modesty, I have some competence : all the chief airs from the best-known operas I am already acquainted with : others I have the faculty of acquiring without difficulty. Believe me, the audiences of Lisbon will have no cause to regret your noble generosity!"

"As to *that*," replied the gentleman, smiling a little broader, and then growing suddenly serious and stroking his chin, "reassure yourself. There are no audiences in any theatre in Lisbon. Even the little box at Bellem, the Boa Hora, is never filled. Were it not for the patrons of arts who in the end pay the salaries of all the actors, those places would have shut up long ago. No, fear nothing : none will know, when you play, whether or not you can tell Sol from La."

With this dubious encouragement Perroquet proceeded to present himself and his letter of introduction the next day at the manager's office : where, owing presumably to the social fragrance of his recommendation, he was engaged at once to play nightly at the Opera for a small standing fee.

C H A P T E R X I V

I

THE worst of his financial fears was thus removed. Some basis of revenue was now secure : more he could hope to earn by day. And he lost none of Hili's society, for it was her bedtime ere he left for the theatre, or at least he made it so ; and happy in the knowledge that she was asleep, after a good supper, he fluted away in the orchestra with great energy and goodwill.

At first, rehearsals puzzled him a good deal. Totally unaccustomed to instrumental unison, he found it difficult to stick to his own part : but concentration and practice overcame this ; and his natural quickness soon absorbed for him a quantity of varied musical knowledge. He learnt, too, that the nobleman had spoken either in error or bitterness, for the musicians, on the whole, though extremely poor, were highly skilled : and the conductor, a man with a gigantic brow and fine, veined ears, decidedly required that his instrumentalists should know Sol from La, and a very great deal besides.

For all that, the theatre was generally empty. The actors often ranted to empty boards, empty benches, and empty boxes. Sometimes, on Sundays, a few rows were filled and a little applause lightened the gloom. But this was nothing. Everyone went about saddened, telling Perroquet how different it had been at the time when the Court was in Lisbon, before the accursed flight of the Royal Family, when Junot was an Ambassador, when Catalini was the favourite, and Angiolini supported the ballets.

This sombre and unsatisfactory state of affairs was given a delightful fillip by the arrival in January of the Duke of Wellington.

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What an ecstasy of excitement ran through the whole town, thus about to be placed once more in the heart of affairs ! Under the blue sky, brilliantly re-burnished, banners fluttered from every balcony, with long streamers of ribbons in the national colours, while ropes of huge paper flowers festooned the streets.

On the day itself, from dawn people thronged the quaysides, watching the flags glitter on the ships in the bay ; Perroguet did well out of their holiday mood. At last the crowds were thrust aside, a very gay, important company pressed through, to marshal themselves at the landing-place : the Life Guards, the British Ambassador, with Portuguese noblemen, and members of the Regency. Hardly had this brilliant assembly taken up position when a terrific salute thundered from the flag-ship : as if by the act of a magician huzzaing burst forth from the populace, "*Viva's !*" were shouted by hundreds of voices, bands of all kinds suddenly started playing every possible tune, contesting with the sound of rockets bursting, of crackers and fireworks exploding, of mules braying, dogs barking, and donkeys screaming to heaven. Amid these demonstrations Lord Wellington landed.

Perroguet pressed forward to see him : he could see only the brilliant members of the entourage—the Staff of the Regent and the Portuguese officers, glittering with stars and orders, a sight to dazzle the sun. Shouts of "*Nosso grande Lorde !*" nearly deafened him ; he was swept forwards with the crowds, who surged towards their idol, the cries of adulation of an old priest, who appeared to be embracing him, rising above all. At last the crowd was beaten back, the idol was enabled to mount his horse, and Perroguet saw him aloft above the screaming heads—an austere figure in a plain grey frock-coat. Almost at once he disappeared again, yet his route could still be marked along the street by the froth of ladies at balconies, flinging flowers, wreaths, and silk scarves at the warrior.—How silly to fling scarves at a warrior ! —Dodging under the hoofs of the escort and between the bodies of the clamourers, Perroguet succeeded in retrieving

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a fine red silk one, which decked Hili for many a day. She was delighted, and spent the whole afternoon trying it in different ways : and Perroquet, too, spent a special time over his toilet : for was not *nossa grande Lorde* to be that evening at the Opera ? Certainly the flautist must not mar the magnificent picture.

Before nightfall the whole city was lighted with innumerable illuminations, banquets seemed to be going on in every house Perroquet passed. Lights, music, food, laughter and wine : a bouquet of the senses. The senses responded willingly. Arrived at the Opera House, he found the whole magnificently decorated with flags, flowers, and gilded palms : the manager himself, twittering within the entrance, resplendent in a grand evening-costume of strawberry velvet, the same shade as the plush that decorated the noble box : while white cotton gloves and red-white-and-blue rosettes were being served out to the members of the orchestra. Choking with excitement and pleasure, Perroquet took his place. From where he was he could see the house was packed, tier after tier. All eyes were directed towards a glittering knot of uniforms in the stage-box. The next minute the curtain rose. Thunderous applause greeted the crowded stage, and the lengthy entertainment began.

Enthralled, the audience beheld the Elysian fields, represented by sunbursts, clouds, and angels, painted on the backcloth ; in these fields, by some happy chance, appeared to be congregated all the Portuguese heroes, past and present. Strolling about, striking attitudes, and recalling their exploits, they passed a considerable time very happily, each actor being allowed a pretty free hand in these preliminary demonstrations : suddenly, at a signal, they all fell on one knee, gazing upwards with an awed surprise. Amid a breathless hush, which unfortunately exposed some internal creakings and rattlings, the figure of Fame descended, clad in white satin, with a golden wreath in her hand : extending this (as soon as equilibrium was attained) in an attitude of adoration, she recited in a regrettably male voice the

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heavenly deeds and the exalted prowess of *Wellington*, which eclipsed in glory those of all the historical personages present. Upon this a furious argument took place. Jealous of their honour, the departed shades disputed the superiority with passion : Fame, however, had an answer for each (indeed it was clear they gave her very fine openings for repartee) : these tarnishing comments on Portuguese heroes being received with roof-rending applause by their inflamed compatriots. In this way the entertainment continued for several hours, the orchestra contributing their accompaniment to bursting-point. To add a fitting finale to the evening it had been intended to cause a wreath of gilded laurel to descend upon the head of Wellington as he stood at attention in his box receiving the last formal salute ; but his Lordship, having perhaps experienced the contretemps frequently associated with Portuguese arrangements, and realising the extreme likelihood of the wreath refusing to descend or dropping instead upon some member of the Pit, considered it prudent to decline this honour.

From these scenes of gaiety and splendour Perroguet, after standing with the crowds at the entrance to view the imposing departure, retired happy and exhausted through the filthy streets

But, thinking it over, this spectacle that honoured France's enemies, he found himself ill at ease. Among all the plaudits he alone had felt aloof, a stranger. Was that because little Skyline was not there ? What a difference the child made to everything !

But he took her to church the following Sunday, to witness, with the rest of the townsfolk, the ceremonial service of Thanksgiving. Hand-in-hand, they stood in a corner, awed by the grandeurs of the scene—the walls covered with velvet, the floor with rich carpets for the feet of the effigies ; the artificial flowers, the gold and silver work, the heaps of jewelled ornaments, the silks, satins, and ribbons of bright colours which, under the brilliant lustres, made the Altar a blaze of light. On the right hand were ranged the canons, dressed as cardinals,

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each with his train-bearer in attendance: opposite sat the bishops: between them and the Altar a magnificent chair in white satin, embroidered with gold and gems, represented mystically the presence of the Pope.

"This, indeed, is something worth seeing, Hili," whispered Perroguet, much impressed. "Look well, my child. You will seldom see such dignity and riches gathered together."

A man beside him nudged his ribs. "Hey, are you a stranger? What do you mean—*riches*? Don't you know Junot has taken the lot, long ago?"—It was true. All the ornaments of silver and gold, the enormous jewels in mitre, crown and robe, were false. Pieces of glass they were, tin and tinsel, as the obliging stranger explained. "Even the paintings!"—He pointed to the wall.

A fresco represented the Queen of Heaven, supported by infant angels on clouds. The gold head-dress, the gold in the robes, the sheets of gold foil of the background, all had been scraped away. From this ruin the gentle face looked out in kindness and beauty. All three stared at the picture.

Hili, too, had her problems. She tugged at his coat: "Perro, why are those babies like *that*?"

"It is because they're little boys," said Perroguet simply.

"So it is," exclaimed the child with contentment, accepting it as she did sunshine or the earth itself.

Perroguet was pleased that this first question should come under the kind eyes of the all-mother. But the man beside him was clutching his arm, pouring into his ear invective against the French robbers, the scoundrels, the demons. "Take care what you are saying," said Perroguet, not knowing why he did, "I may be a Frenchman myself." The man fell back aghast, as if he had touched a leper.

Perroguet left the church, troubled.

All the afternoon he played his guitar for the crowds dressed in their best, for the dancers of bolero and fan-dango. Gaiety continued undiminished, the lotteries

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were crowded, and in the evening the Opera was packed as before.

Yet these rejoicings, which continued for some time on the swell of the return of prosperity to Lisbon, though they had at first roused in Perroguet an instinctive response, ended by becoming wearisome ; the old craving to wander strengthened with the advancing year, as the sun brightened the countryside and showed up ever more plainly the dust-motes, the worn velvet, the shabby benches in the Opera House at afternoon rehearsals, and heated with an ever more unbearable reflected stuffiness the tired sweating audiences of hot nights.

'What, am I to be tied here for ever ?' he thought. 'Truly I wanted a monthly wage that I could rely upon, especially with the winter before me, but some things can be bought too dearly. I cannot sit here all my life like a trussed fowl. And Hili is looking pale. The city is too hot, and every day it grows fouler.' He would not admit, even to himself, any deeper reason.

II

Yet with a very real joy they found themselves on the road again. The green of the trees seemed kindlier than ever after the operatic sylvan shades, the skies vaster, the stars so bright and so close you could nearly touch them. Here, at least, things are real, thought Perroguet, remembering the faded everlasting backcloths . . .

Another thing was curious, too ; he was no longer the performer now, he and Hili were the audience : Life was the performer, as it had been before ; and very obligingly it went through its scenes, providing something interesting and unexpected in nearly every act. Yes, a rich entertainment, thought Perroguet, all we have to do is to lean back in our comfortable seats and look on.

They might be sitting on a grassy bank overlooking a wide plain. Across this, as on some monstrous stage, cantered perhaps a Generalissimo, in a white uniform with silver lace, mounted on a black Andalusian charger, his staff in blue, escorted by a troop of Lancers in yellow.

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" What a picture, eh, Hili ? Free, too. No neighbour's elbows in your sides or his knees in your back. Yes, the sun is better than footlights, what do *you* think ? "—Or perhaps it would be Lord Wellington himself, with his splendid English hounds, passing across the landscape at a gallop, dressed as a country gentleman and followed by a mixed field. A hearty, reassuring sight. Sometimes, at three miles an hour, a carriage would creak by, a heavy square box drawn by mules in rope harness, the coachman and postillions in cocked hats and queues, while from within peered the pale, sallow face of some lady of the nobility on her way to be wed : or sometimes a convoy of mules, the leader with a metal cylinder clanging at his neck, and a high Moorish saddle, his rider with one spur on the left foot, a knife at his belt, and a pouch full of cartridges : others laden perhaps with two ladies sitting in baskets on opposite sides of the powerful animals, or perhaps four or five wool-bags, obliterating their supporters altogether. The muleteers were hardy, dirty, and merry. Flinging their arms about, they related the genealogy of their beasts, explained why they were never allowed to lie down at night, and bragged of their own feats in walking and running. With their huge tasselled hats, short cloaks and plush breeches, and their ribald songs, they seemed like the Mad Coachmen of the legend, especially when, as often happened nowadays, their mules were decked in richly embroidered ecclesiastical vestments (jetsam of some church's despoiling), their ears pricking up with a confident air through some bishop's head-dress or mitre. Perroquet regarded their extraordinary appearance with affection, remembering his rescue on a mule-cart, and his first consciousness mingling with the muleteer's back and the creaking wheels.

Even more extraordinary was the spectacle of the Officers of Dragoons, who, well-fed and idle, exercised their spirits in parading the country in a variety of incongruous disguises, showing an ingenuity that was remarkable, if not always in the strictest sense refined. These exuberant gentlemen every night made merry in

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their messes, playing their billiards of twenty-five pockets, getting drunk, filling the air with their boisterous singings, and throwing crockery and furniture out of the window. Dodging the missiles, Perroguet picked up quite a quantity of useful articles in this manner : and once, while so engaged, being discovered, he was invited in to the officers' company, where he sang a number of songs and departed well recompensed.

Another curious apparition was the Spanish peasantry attired in huge bearskins of French Chasseurs of the Guard picked up on battlefields. A poor wood-cutter was seen for weeks wearing the ceremonial uniform of Marshal Soult, taken at Vittoria. After Vittoria there were, indeed, pickings. Silver candlesticks, silver and gold cups, flagons and salt-pots, chased mirrors, robes of velvet and gold lace, silk sheets, coloured silk shirts and stockings, watches, seals, jewelled chains. Perroguet obtained a scarlet coat in which he was grand for many months and one or two white silk shirts with J embroidered in red under a crown (the property of Joseph, King of Naples), which made charming dresses for Hili. To dress in a king's shirt, that was indeed remarkable. He was proud of this. " See what I have, how fine we go ! " his glance cried to his friend the muleteer when next they passed him. Understanding, the muleteer checked his song, and without a word pointed with scorn and triumph before him. Each of his mule's tails was decorated near the rump with a glitter of ribbon and metal, each bore a Cross of the Legion of Honour, of the 1st Class. . . .

' Yes, we laugh, we are interested, we gain something, and we pass on,' thought Perroguet. His face was to the East, they had passed across Spain and were approaching the French border. How well he remembered his first lonely passage across the hills, when the society of shepherds had been welcome. " Or perhaps it is we who stand still and countries and events pass before us ? " This was very complicated. He felt it was not an impossible supposition, yet he could not see how it arranged itself, for in that case the shepherds and the muleteers, and the

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English Dragoons, and King Joseph himself, and even Lord Wellington, were no more than shadows, existing only to give him, Perroguet, a few hours of interest and wonder. Surely that seemed *very nearly* impossible? It was no good questioning Hili on these matters. She simply laughed and continued to pick flowers.

The only person who seemed to understand this point of view and with whom he could discuss it was an Indian conjurer whom they met on his way to a fair and in whose company they travelled for some weeks. Juggernaut Singh, King of Mystery, this man called himself, and a more thoughtful creature Perroguet had seldom met. Even to the most fantastic ideas he would extend a dignified courtesy, relapsing into contemplation sometimes for hours before making a reply. When he spoke it was in a quiet suspension of the mind, his words sinking into the silence they had hardly troubled. According to him, mind was the only true governor: a mind correctly adjusted brought towards it, without exertion, those things that were fitting and to be desired. It was pleasant to discuss this charming theory as one tramped along the road in sunny weather, or cooked one's food, peacefully, of an evening: when it came to the point, however, the mind was not always quite so successful.

Juggernaut travelled two girls with him, nieces, he told Perroguet. They helped in handing him things, in distracting the audience, and in collecting the money afterwards. Another important rôle was theirs. The main-stay of his entertainment was the Basket-Trick (World-famous, as he called it). For this a wicker-basket with a double centre and a large heavy lid was brought on by one niece; being clumsy she dropped it (this loosened the spring): angered, the magician turned upon her, deciding, as a punishment, to shut her up in it; but, softened by her tears, consented first to blindfold her: hardly was this done before the girl escaped among the crowd, but the next instant was hauled out again and enclosed within the chest, through which the magician now savagely thrust his sword. The crowd never failed

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to shudder at the screams that came from within, nor to make a dash forward in indignant rescue: nor to gasp with surprise when the lid was thrown open and the basket revealed to be empty. At this juncture, to add to their amazement, the girl strolled up, totally unhurt, from the back of the audience.

To Perroguet this trick was soon familiar. For the girl who fled into the crowd the first time was replaced by the other niece, similarly dressed and bandaged, who was no sooner in the basket than she began to scream, directing the sword-thrusts away from her from within: when the lid was flung open the false centre rolled out with the girl upon it, hidden by the thrown-back lid: at which moment the original niece made her spectacular reappearance. This trick was done hundreds of times without a hitch, or any suspicion of the existence of a second girl; but one evening, passing behind the basket, Perroguet saw that the spring was jammed, that the imprisoned girl would never be able to escape, and that Juggernaut Singh, quite unconscious of this, was just about to fling the box open and expose his own secret.

What could be done? There was not a moment to think. Letting out a yell as if seized with cramp, he stumbled, and falling against the basket allowed his cloak to catch on the edge and hang there, torn from his shoulder. Still bawling with pain he hobbled off distractedly among the audience. This extraordinary proceeding on his friend's part naturally aroused the magician's suspicions: it was not a difficult task, under cover of detaching the cloak, to free the spring again, and, when the disturber's yells had subsided in the distance, to continue the performance.

"Well," said Perroguet, "don't think I dispute your theory, but how was it your mind did not inform you of your danger, or, in fact, release the spring for you without your exertion?"

Juggernaut, after eight hours' contemplation of this question, was still unable to answer it. He was grateful, nevertheless. "You have saved my honour," he said in

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his most mystic voice. "I cannot reward you with money" ('Why not?' thought Perroguet, 'I shouldn't object'), "but in memory of our comradeship I will give you this." He produced from his travelling-bag of a conjurer a small picture in gold and pale colours. "It is a portrait of the goddess Parbutti."

Perroguet was overwhelmed. It was an exquisite piece of work. "Your mind at least," he exclaimed politely, "is sufficiently well adjusted to bring to *others* what is fitting and to be desired!"

This speech struck them both as singularly happy. The King of Mystery bowed in sombre and pleased dignity. His prestige was restored.

III

Within a few months they crossed the border into France, the pass was easy in the summer. Across France they drifted: on foot, in carts, in wagons, nearing ever those flat lands where history had just written a burning name or two.

The time slid by, as noiseless as a cloud. The defeat at Waterloo troubled them not. It was dramatic, it was extraordinary; the downfall of Napoleon was a terrible disaster to be heard discussed a thousand times in bar-parlours: but it did not touch them. Was Napoleon, too, a shadow in Perroguet's mind, even as those others, as unsubstantial as the last village, giving a momentary interest, passed through and forgotten? Or as the pageant of the world rolling continually before them?— Sometimes cities, sometimes hills and winding rivers, sometimes storms and sometimes days of idyllic peace. Roads always: and always, too, the succession of strange faces, voices, opinions. But these changes troubled Perroguet no longer: Skyline's little face was always constant.

Indeed, her presence brought him not only a daily happiness, but made money-making easier. Everyone caught from her an infectious joy, as if the springs of her nature bubbled so clear that within them people could

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see the reflections of their own selves, idealised as they would like to be.

For her, too, the world spread newly, showing its treasures, the humble treasures of earth and air, as in the beginning of Eden. To these discoveries she gave herself in ecstasy.

One day it is a new flower, growing up from the middle of a streamlet, covering in a few days the whole surface of the water with its tiny white stars : one day it is a litter of puppies playing catch with each other and losing their balance and growling very fiercely, so that you can do nothing but stand in the village street laughing with pleasure and longing to possess one of them : one day, in the new country you have just entered, upon the flat lands laced with swamps and ditches, where no one speaks of anything but battles, it is the little stiff tankards that hold the moss-pollen. They are tiny, perfect, exquisitely made. You lift the lid and the bright green powder pours out. It is soft as silk, soft as paste, it covers your fingers like a green film. You rub it on your cheeks, it feels smooth as cream. You look in the marsh pool, oh, ha-ha-ha, you are green like the moss, you *are* the moss, the moss, the moss ! You dance up and down like a wild thing, you fling out your arms, you find a sort of lightness running up from your toes like a fire. You spring from the earth as if you had no weight, you curve and sway like the wind over the stream. You think you are alone in the world with the moss under your toes. Then you see Perro, already far away on the road, getting smaller.

"Come on now, darling, we must be moving along." His voice comes back to you like a ghost, like a puff of wind, from the distance ; but you see he has turned, and stopped, and is holding out his hand.

As they came round the corner they saw a coach on the roadside broken down and being repaired. Beside it a hook-nosed lady with bulging blue eyes was sitting on a coach cushion. At the back of the coach stood a young

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man overseeing the repairs and looking furious ; as soon as Perroguet appeared he shouted, asking the way to the nearest smithy.

Hastening towards them, Perroguet shouting aloud his whole knowledge of the district, he observed the gentleman with interest. Clearly he was not an ordinary traveller. Wild and imperious he looked : hatless, with a great lock of auburn hair falling across his brow : while a wide collar and informal cravat appearing above his long, satin-lined Joseph of blue cloth contributed to the impression of the bizarre. With highly coloured and forcible expressions he was cursing the delay that tethered them on that abominable road.

"Have you forgot, my angel," said the lady in English, twitching up her lilac roquelaure where it touched the ground and settling her lace tippet, "have you forgot the time when once you declared your preference for a few seconds spent in a desert with me to an age in a Palace with another ?"

He darted at her a savage look. "I must have forgot most things ere I cease to recall it." His tone adding, "Since you incessantly remind me of it !"

"Let us, then, pacify our minds," resumed the lady, "in this accidental strait, by lingering upon that happy situation, whither, had circumstances been other, we might have repaired. A blue sea's tenderness and compassion, a mountain behind it, a demesne, though very retired, not absolutely out of the world——"

"What the devil are you talking about, Arabella ?"

He turned aside impatiently to the repairs. Hili and Perroguet came up at this moment and Perroguet bowed. The lady bulged her eyes in amazement at the fairy child, golden and green. She was English, the lady : moreover, she was travelling with a poet. She groped in her mind for something to say : extending a hand in a lilac patten, she drew the child towards her.

"In your wandering through the woods, have you ever seen a fairy, a pixie, a goblin ?" she enquired, smiling greedily, in execrable French.

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Hili was terribly puzzled. She was frightened, too, by the pale hawk-face. She looked at Perroguet. He made her a sign to answer.

No, she had never seen a fairy.

The lady thrust her away. "See, Byron, it is always the same. The peasantry are quite without soul."

The gentleman came out from behind the coach and for the first time he looked at Hili, from the top of her gold head and her green, stained cheeks to her green, stained feet. An indescribable expression passed over his face. The lady looked at him in astonishment. He said nothing : he gave a deep sigh and covered his face. As if the murmur was shaken out of him, he spoke. "*Nymph-haunted woods, and the blue trembling sea.*"

He opened his eyes again and swept them between the child and lady, a little smile of malice lifted his lips. "*One green star tingling in a lilac sky——*" He looked at her with meaning. The lady blushed scarlet in mortification.

Hili began to giggle.

Perroguet was deeply ashamed. These people, however madly they might converse, were clearly English milords, demanding respect ; how bad of Hili to show such misplaced levity. "Hush, Hili ! Really, you are no better than Suki the bear !" he said in a shocked undertone.

The gentleman looked up quickly. "You are fond of bears ? "

Perroguet bowed. "I know one, slightly, your honour."

"We are friends, then. Bears are a great link. I kept one at Trinity, it did well, almost took a degree."

He nodded carelessly and turned again to the coach. "But I won't keep you, friend," he remarked over his shoulder. "Thank you for your directions, and take care of your morsel of Greece."

Perroguet departed along the road, interested and puzzled. He did not know who they were : he knew only that hardly had he turned the corner than he was wishing he could meet again that personality that gave such a sense of interest, friendliness and power. . . .

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But life granted no turning back. There was only to continue ever onwards.

Easily, as the happy months sped, they continued their journeyings. They had left Belgium, they were travelling South. Near Valence and the basin of Rhone they came to the Landes, where the shepherds, in tall hats, and carrying immense balancing-sticks, walked on stilts fifteen feet high, in order to see widely over the plains where sheep often were lost in the high fern, and to stalk over the ground at ten miles an hour to encircle their flocks. Reminded of his adventure with the bandit of the high wall, he related it to Hili with much merriment: his spirits rising with every step towards the past, now rich with the added gifts of the present. And suddenly he realised they were there, on the borders of Provence.

The first thing he did was to purchase a shawm and a Basque tambourine: and singing the old Basque ballads to these, he felt his whole being radiated with joy and contentment. "I feel as if at last I was bringing you home," he told Hili. With an inexpressible pleasure he neared the village of Paget Pelvoux, passing one evening the very spot at the wood's edge where he had camped that night with Andrea, Sebastian and Suki. . . . Yet, already one was lost. "What would I not give to meet Andrea again!" thought Perroguet, rich in his new possession. Yes, he had been poor, then, so many years ago: now he could never be poor again, or lonely. He could give, out of his happiness, to Andrea, who, with all his goods and all his knowledge, had never owned so much.

But look, there was Father Dolin, just the same as ever, the evening light shining on his round blue jowl and the soft folds of his habit. Perroguet ran up to him, took his hand, begged his remembrance; his brown face wreathed in smiles, he recalled to the good father their many meetings at the fairs in the village.

"Yes, yes," said the priest kindly, "the musician with the wonderful memory: I recollect."

A little cloud fell over Perroguet. It was not his pleasure to remember that deceit. Refusing its shadow,

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he tumbled out, word over word, the history of all that had passed. Yes, while this village had basked in peace, he, Perroguet, had encountered strange and magnificent adventures! The journey through Spain, the Insurrection in Madrid, the narrow escapes from death, the terrible marches, the horrors of the Retreat, the majestic clash of armies, and at last, as in climax, the miraculous rescue of the child. All, all, he told him; as if by so doing, in this place where he felt he most truly belonged, he could make of these unrelated events a crystal, whole and complete.

Father Dolin listened tolerantly. He turned to the little girl who stood beside them, laying his firm hand kindly upon her head.

"So you are the outcome of these sensational experiences? Poor orphan. Who knows what your fate might have been! What is your name?"

"Hili."

"Speak up, my child, do not be afraid. I asked, what is your name?"

"Hili."

The priest was surprised. "Short for——?" he urged. The child was silent.

"Come, now. Let me see, you are a big girl. You must be seven or eight. Surely you know your own name?"

"It is Skyline," said Perroguet, feeling suddenly ashamed.

Father Dolin looked extremely shocked. "I was asking in seriousness, my friend," he observed. He continued to stare at the child. She lost her smile. She hung her head and seemed on the verge of tears.

Father Dolin removed his hand and, as it were, his benediction. He turned to Perroguet severely. "After hearing your remarkable story, naturally I cannot fail to be interested. I ask merely for the baptismal name of this little one from motives of friendliness."

In a moment the atmosphere was charged with guilt. It transpired, of course, that Hili had never been baptised.

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Very soon, amid a torrent of explanations, Perroguet was gesticulating frantically, Hili was in tears, while the priest, rubbing his chin more gravely than ever, and looking anxious and disturbed, was expatiating on the eternal damnation of unbaptised souls.

" My son, you have done extremely wrong. Consider : what would have happened to this poor child had she died suddenly, by some accident in your wild, roving life ? To what would you have condemned her, this young soul ? To burn in hell with the flames licking round her for ever ! Would you like that ? Imagine yourself in a red-hot oven. The blood boils in your veins, the brains seethe in your head. Your feet burn on the red-hot floor, you jump up, the walls are red-hot too, so is the ceiling. The devil and his assistants are piling up the fire around you for ever."

Hili shrieked. She buried her head in Perroguet's coat. He was trembling all over. " Is this really true, Father, can you be sure ? "

" If you do not believe *me*, my son, you can see the whole thing for yourself, painted out in every detail on the North wall of the chapel. The ancient fathers never had any doubts. This modern curse of doubt filters everywhere. But the old truths stand, firmer than ever."

He paused deliberately, and left them.

Perroguet was unable to sleep all night. It was true enough, he had done wrong, the child had not been baptised. He must have forgotten it, in his happiness. No one had ever reminded him. Now the saints and the angels might be terribly angry.

Just after midnight something disturbed him. They were lying in a little hut, accommodation hired from an old woman who sold almonds in the village: an evil hag she had looked, and a foreigner too, but no other shelter was available. Sleepless, now, in his anxiety, Perroguet became aware that without noise the curtain had parted that shielded the old crone's sleeping-place. She had crept out ; and now, shading the dim light carefully, she stood looking at Hili. All at once he saw, outside the door, a

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dark, unkempt, ferocious young man, the woman's son, waiting ; his shaggy head outlined by the moon. In the same instant the woman made as if to lift the child.

With a wild cry Perroguet sprang up. The old woman fell back, stuttering. "Why, what a shock you gave me ! What are you doing ?"

"What are *you* doing ?" cried Perroguet furiously.

Nobody answered. The shadow had vanished from the doorway. The hag mumbled, fumbled her beads, and, bent double, crept back again within the curtain.

It was enough. It scared Perroguet. Child-stealing was only too common. A beautiful child, in particular, was often an irresistible temptation. A beautiful girl-child, greater than ever. She could be made so useful—to serve, to sing, to sell, perhaps even to be sold. If Hili were stolen, how could he establish ownership ? The child did not exist. She had not even a name. What should he do ? If only Andrea were here, he who had studied so much, who knew everything. . . .

For two days he wandered about distracted, without the heart to sing, hearing only the voices of arguments pointing his behaviour. Then he made up his mind. He found Father Dolin again. "I have been thinking it over, Father. Do as you will. You know best."

The priest smiled. "I have been thinking it over, too. Yes, I have given much thought to this problem, and the solution is clear." He turned to Hili and regarded her gravely. "First, I will have a little talk with her. Come with me, little one, do not be afraid." He took her by the hand and led her away. The shadow of his flowing black robe engulfed her.

In a short while he returned. He seemed tired and stern ; but Hili looked flushed and her lip was trembling. The priest sat down heavily and began to speak. "I find she has had very little religious instruction. Children of her age should know at least the answers to the cardinal questions : but she does not even appear to have heard of them. Her ignorance is incredible. Her mind is like the mind of a heathen. Fancy, would you believe it, she

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told me she thought the sky was made to wrap the world in, instead of existing, as we all know, as a floor for the Madonna and Saints to walk upon. This disgraceful state of affairs must not continue. For this child's sake, my son, as well as your own, and in expiation of your sinful neglect of all these years, there is only one course. It is what I had already considered. When she is baptised she shall be given to the Convent of our Lady, the one for foundlings. Yes, that is in every way the most suitable place for this orphan. I know the Mother well, a good woman. Only the other day she told me how greatly they needed new-comers to fill the cloisters which are cold, huge, and half empty. In any case, it is not fit that you should be the sole protector of a young girl. What sort of a life is it for her? You should be able to see that for yourself. No, let the nuns take her."

He spoke with finality, as if the thing were already accomplished. All the time he was patting her head, while with his other hand he still held hers firmly.

"Is that for her good? For her own good? Would their company truly be better for her than mine?" asked Perroguet humbly. He had never felt so unhappy in his life.

"Well, naturally. Be assured of that. It is she whom we are considering. Leave it to me, my son. I will arrange everything." He raised his hand in a wearied yet determined gesture. Released, Hili flew at once to Perroguet and clung to him.

"My darling, my Skyline, understand. It is for your own good. The Father says so—" He could not go on.

He felt numbed and powerless. One strong, one resolute defiance, and Hili could still be his. It was his love for her that bound him: he twisted in its bonds. With every twist the bonds cut sharper; he became every moment more a prisoner, helpless and bleeding. "Be happy, my darling. I—do not forget me."

"Why, not so tragic!" said Father Dolin, smiling again. He had gained his point. "You will, of course,

from time to time be allowed to visit the Convent. Perhaps every few months. Oftener, as she becomes more settled. After a year or two, after a few years,—well, we shall see." With a business-like air he rose. "Has she any belongings?"

"Only these." Like a man in a dream Perroguet dived into his knapsack and produced the wooden spoon and the little crucifix.

"That is at least something." He took the two articles gravely. "Be comforted, my son. You will not regret this. You have done what is right." He held out his hand to the child.

Perroguet was trying to disengage her clasp. All this time she had spoken nothing, now suddenly she found her tongue.

"Perro, why must I go with *him*?" She pointed her finger indignantly at the priest's face.

"Why, I have told you. For your own good, darling. For the good of your soul. So that you shan't be burnt, as he said."

"I don't think I'd be burnt, anyway. Perro wouldn't let me. You wouldn't let me, Perro: would you, Perro?" The child was screaming. Father Dolin once more put his hand out kindly towards her. She bit it.

"Evidently it is none too soon to begin the work of salvation," he said sharply. "Let us pray good St. Nicholas it is not too late. I will save this soul from damnation in spite of the devil."

With one movement he threw the child over his shoulder, and turning, he tramped off. The last Perroguet saw was the broad striding figure in the black robes, and against the evening light the frail shape of the child beating upon its shoulders with all the force of her arms.

C H A P T E R X V

I

ALL that had happened so swiftly he could hardly believe it was true.

The loss of Skyline left him without ballast, without stay. He could not accustom himself to this gap in his mind which lived only as a pain. Waking in the night he would put out a hand to see if she was warm and safe : it would touch only the cold wall, and strike back into the emptiness of his heart. Or walking in a field or past a cottage, seeing something that was pretty, or strange, or amusing, 'I must show Hili,' he would think instinctively : 'I must tell Hili. Hili would like to see this. Hili would love to hear that !' Like a blow came the knowledge that Hili was gone. Lost in some meditation, he would turn suddenly to take her hand, to speak to her. There was no one beside him. Yes, look where he might, down the long road or across the meadow, no small form would come hurrying up to him, flushed and busy, her arms full of flowers.

Yet he could not leave the neighbourhood. He prowled round the building where they had penned her. Looking on that, even that blank case showing here and there between trees, eased him a little. She was happy in there, at least, he knew.

Within an old Moorish convent the nuns had made their dwelling. Its pale yellow walls were high and spacious, the tall gate, surrounded with iron scrolls, reared as high as the roof its ornamental carvings. From a belfry a chime of bells sounded almost continuously. The river wound alongside, banked with orange-trees, limes and olives. Besides this, the Convent was well

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endowed and well furnished, and occupied, according to custom, not only by destitute foundlings, but also by younger daughters of the nobility. Yes, she would be kindly taught and tended. . . .

As in a waking dream the months passed ; the summer had flown ere he was allowed to present himself formally at the Convent for the first time. The near sight of it shook him a little, it looked so grimly imprisoning. Iron bars were vertical across all the windows, the huge door behind the pretty gate was studded with nails, and even this held an iron grid closed by a shutter sliding across from within. He knocked at this door. The shutter opened : through the bars a pale face enquired his business. He sat in the little court for a long time, patiently, with a thumping heart, until it was convenient to allow him to see his protégée, Marie-Céleste.

At last the little figure came out with a gravity that was new : she halted just outside the great door and looked around quietly : but as soon as she saw him her face became radiant ; she trotted up and flung herself into his arms. It was all right. It was as though they had never parted. She was still his Hili, as before. He went home a little comforted.

From now onwards he dwelt in a state of suspension, letting the days pass by him without any conscious knowledge, and living only for the times when he could visit the Convent. Whenever he was allowed he came to see the child, waiting humbly on a bench in the court, with a basket of figs, or eggs, or whatever he had managed to bring for the Sisters. Yet however meekly he resigned himself to the separation, the thought of the day of her release was never absent from his mind. In contentment and hope he waited for this, like a lover for his bride, like the year for the spring. Her eclipse was something that had to be endured, like night, to achieve the destined ripeness of the day. On the happiness of that day he fixed his thought. Only a year or two, Father Dolin had said.

But one day one of his visits was a little disconcerting.

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It was Sister Auguste herself who, it was announced, wished to speak to him : when she had done so, he might see Marie-Céleste. Perroquet waited, trembling : was she ill, had she hurt herself, what could have happened ?

The Sister bustled up, her face friendly but severe. Under the white cowl it seemed to be washed of colour and gross human disguises : it was no more than bone with the skin stretched over, giving no check to the calm inner light. Perroquet rose instantly, uttering his only thought. "Is she all right, Hi—Marie-Céleste?"

"Of course she is all right. Yes, she is doing very well. Undisciplined, but what can one expect?" She turned towards him abruptly. "Did you know your ward can draw? She has a very distinct talent. Cultivated, it might become something considerable."

"Draw?" An inexpressible happiness flooded him. His anxieties vanished on the instant. Something new, yet always known, hovered on the horizon of his mind. "Can she draw, indeed? Can she paint?"

"Oh, yes, very nicely. Her sense of form, as of colour, is remarkable. We must say that for her."

It was almost unbelievable. It was as if his father, long dead, had whispered again. On the vision of the future his thoughts raced ; and the future turned, curving, and linked again with the past, enclosing all earth's treasure. 'She will draw the trees,' thought Perroquet, 'the streams, the outline of hills on the sunset, the sky when it is full of clouds. All those things that I try to draw with my flute, that I almost have, and that ever escape me. But now, together, between us, we will capture it. Ha, my darling, when you are free, what a time we will have.' He stood silent in ecstasy in the dream of the conquest of that elusive beauty.

"What does she draw?"

"Saints."

"Saints?" A little of the joy faded. Somehow, this was less good. Looking at Sister Auguste's white, solemn face, he found himself suddenly turning a little solemn too.

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"Yes, and angels." The Sister's voice lowered and gave an unmistakable warning of something unpleasant. "Cherubs. Little girl cherubs and little boy cherubs." The Sister broke off. "Really, it is deplorable. She is such a delightful little thing too: a favourite with everyone. I mention it only that you may know our difficulties."

"But what could be better?" asked Perroguet happily: then again he felt bewildered and alarmed. At last a thought struck him. "Has the little monkey been scribbling all over her copy-books?"

"Oh, no. She does them beautifully on the drawing-blocks and colours them with gold. But they have no—that is, they are undraped," said the Sister.

All at once Perroguet wanted to shout with laughter, the relief was so enormous. Instantly, he sobered. Angels, of course, were no laughing matter.

"I was obliged to reprimand her severely." (Poor little Skyline.) "There are some things she appears to be incapable of understanding. You would say the mind of a Pagan. It shall be corrected, of course, with care and discipline, punishment if necessary. In the meantime her paints have been taken away. You will understand if she appears to be, this afternoon, a little tearful."

After this it was not surprising to find Hili changed, subdued. They spoke for a while, sitting hand-in-hand on the bench, on desultory subjects; her voice was flat, her eyes had lost their joy. It was plain that being "reprimanded severely" had made a deep impression upon her. Suddenly, without preamble, she looked up, fixing him with her clear gaze.

"Perro, you know those little boys bathing in the surf on the sands in the hot summers, and the other ones painted on the wall in that cathedral?"

Perroguet whistled: fearing what was coming.

"When I drew some baby angels Sister said it was improper."

"Sister is a very good and holy woman, and whatever she says is right." Then from his heart came the un-

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checkable cry : " My darling, nothing that God made is improper, nothing ! My child, my darling, you *do* believe that ?—" He stopped. He saw she was completely confused. Already too many agencies were at work on Father Dolin's salvaged soul.

After this, situations of a difficult sort continually arose. When it was not one thing it was another. Only a few weeks later she was in trouble again. Perroguet saw at the first glance that something was wrong. He waited in patience, knowing that before long it would come out : Hili could never keep anything from him, even if she had wished. Indeed, in her earnestness she lived the whole scene again.

" Perro, yesterday there was a baby bird that had fallen out of its nest ! Quite tiny, it had hardly any feathers on yet, only skin, and its body was split with falling. There were a lot of loops, Perro, like wheels they were, of the most wonderful orange colour, like the sun, and some lovely green ones, all shining. And I said, ' Look ; beautiful, beautiful bird ! ' But when Sister came she saw it and she said, ' Marie-Céleste, this is a very disgusting sight. I don't understand how you can look at it. Turn your eyes away at once ! ' But I said, ' Sister, you always tell us to look at the beautiful colours of birds.'—' That, my child, is on their *wings*.' And she didn't explain any more, but told me to pray that I might know right from wrong, and good from evil, so that in the end I might find the light." . . .

What could he say ? How was it possible that Sister Auguste should be mistaken ? She must know, she who had studied these things. Perroguet could do no more than listen in wonder, and himself, too, try to understand. But it soon became plain that there were some things one couldn't understand. At each visit he learned of some new complexity. Living in her life with most of his waking thoughts, he could picture from her clear recitals, the scenes in the Convent. . . .

" But what *is* evil, Sister ? "

" Evil is what is not good."

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"Oh, I think I see now. God made man and woman ; and then God made good and evil."

Pause.

"Why did God make evil, Sister ? "

"God didn't make evil. What a ridiculous idea."

"Then how does evil *be* ? If God didn't make it, who made it ? "

"The devil, of course."

"Then is the devil stronger than God, that evil can go on being, against God's will ? "

"No. Nothing can happen against God's will."

"Oh, I see. Then God wants evil. I suppose He likes it, really. I often think it is rather nice, myself. A change from only good always. I think—"

Sister tells her she must not think : the devil will only put wrong thoughts into her mind ; if ever she finds herself beginning to think she must repeat twelve Pater-nosters instead.

Pause.

"Did our Blessed Lord come down and die on all those stars ? "

"Of course not. That is nonsense."

"Then were they all saved of themselves ? Were they all good, without evil ? "

"Who ? "

"The people on them."

"The Church has not told us that there *are* people on them. What a very, very wicked idea."

"But, if there's no one on them, why did God make them ? "

"To give us light at night, so we need not use too much oil, and to guide the mariners when there is no moon."

"But, then, why are there so many—more, more than we can see ? When I was with Perro, I used to look up in the night and some were big and just near my head, and some used to go off tiny and tiny into a sort of mist : and I could see—"

"Really, Marie-Céleste, I cannot stop listening to your silly chatter. At night, my child, you should be sleeping

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and not looking at the stars. If you wake up, keep your eyes closed and repeat the Hail-Mary six times. That will prevent idle and wicked thoughts entering your mind."

She was a steady, pious, determined woman, Sister Auguste. She found Marie-Céleste's questions very trying: but though she stopped them thus, who shall say they did not weigh upon her a good deal? Indeed, it would have taken more than a Sister Auguste, thought Perroguet, to answer a child: or to keep out for ever, with prayers, intrusive and unanswerable thoughts.

But the Sister had another method, too. Indeed, her remedies were simple. Whenever a wave of awkward questioning surged through the Convent-school, or religious doubts, or disobedience, she had a prompt and efficacious cure. "Your health, my child, appears a little out of order," she would observe dryly, giving each of the children a hearty dose of oil. Certainly, that quelled them. Either the dread of it, or the lowering after-effects, induced a period of quiescence during which the school life flowed on in peace: and as soon as these chastened phases wore off, and the other moods rose again into a troublesome surge, they were quelled again by Sister Auguste, methodical and imperturbable.

At the same time the nuns were kind and very patient. Perroguet saw that Hili was learning a number of useful things, which he could never have taught her. How to sew. How to embroider. How to write. How to acquire a civilised decorum. It was good that she should be there: and all the while the time was passing, bringing nearer without cease the moment of her freedom.

At this period he roamed the South of France, never being very long away from Paget Pelvoux. He knew the village well by now, but he could not bear to lodge there, remembering the hut of the old hag and the scene of his relinquishment of Hili. When he came to see her, therefore, he stayed in the neighbouring town of Toussaindu, stopping on these occasions with one Blanchard, a friendly apothecary.

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He had first come across this man one dark, windy evening, when, soaked to the skin, he had wandered the streets unable to find shelter. The apothecary had taken him in, given him fire, soup, and an old warm wrap. Then, suddenly, humming a tune, it was discovered he also loved music. There they had sat, the pair of them, all the evening, side by side, singing in harmony : the apothecary's voice was not strong, but it was true. An enormous number of lyrics they enjoyed , and as the night grew later, and the sounds of the world stilled, and their hearts opened, a fellowship of the centuries had sprung up between them. And when it came to that song of the maiden who swears fidelity to her dying lover, their eyes, moistened with drink and smoke, had gazed rapturously into the last glowing coals in the brazier, while unconscious of incongruity their voices hovered in notes of exquisite beauty, pathos and feeling.

To this soul-mate, therefore, Perroguet returned each time after visiting the Convent. Not always, however, did he find him in a convivial mood. Sometimes he was sour and exasperated. " Ah, you," he would say bitterly, and truer than he knew, " you belong to the past. Would I did, too ! Nowadays a man of worth might as well hang himself. An honest man is wasted, my friend. Look at the parchment diplomas of science and medicine hanging in every little shop. All false ! Bought for a few francs ! Look at the surgical instruments laid out in cases in the window to attract you to have your operation done there. All rusty. Weapons of murderers more like. Oh, miserable honesty, what bread do you buy your unlucky possessor ? "

From which Perroguet would gather that competition latterly had been unusually severe, possibly owing to his friend's excessive overnight potations. On these occasions they fell into serious vein, Perroguet relating his multiple adventures, in exchange for the story of Blanchard's life, from both of which the apothecary drew sad, cynical morals reflecting on the little helpfulness of virtue and religion.

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Next morning the old man would be as lively as ever, and as orthodox.

One day he showed Perroguet the Church, sharing with all his fellow-townspeople the admiration of strangers for this historic building. Here, amid countless treasures, the Virgin sat, in wax, with curled hair, a brocaded gown and jewelled bracelets. They were all very proud of her. The rings on her fingers were of the costliest gold, the rarest and brightest gems. A rivulet of green fire ran round her neck, suspending a golden heart studded with rubies.

Perroguet was deeply impressed. He thought of all the poverty in the lands he had been through, the filthy streets, the starving children and sick animals. "One, only, of these gems," he exclaimed involuntarily, "would keep a whole village in plenty in the parts where I have been. Yet this waxen figure is loaded with clothes and riches!"

"Well, why not? Does not she of all women on earth deserve gifts, adornment?"

"But is she on earth? Come, is she not in heaven?"

"Her spirit dwells on earth, in every shrine."

Perroguet remembered the streets of Portugal. "Her spirit must be busy, then." He turned to his friend. "Wherever I travel I find this: one will give velvet robes to the image of wood, even if old Pierre and his family are in rags and lacking bread. Yet why? Is it that the hungry can feast their eyes on cornelian and gold, or fill their stomachs with the pattern composed of sapphires, enough to set a whole province on its feet and satisfy the needs of a generation? Besides, in any case, if it is a matter of a spirit, why dress up a waxen body?"

"And why keep on arguing?" cried the apothecary, incensed. "Are you no better than a heathen? I know what it is. Intercourse with those heretic English soldiers has contaminated you. Your priest was quite right. A good thing the child was taken from you before it caught the plague from your ideas!"

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Perroguet placated him. " You must forgive me, comrade. Indeed, I sometimes wonder myself what I am saying, or why I say it."

He turned again with reverence to the figure of the Madonna. Certainly it was enchantingly beautiful. It filled him with a sense of the same loveliness that lay in the natural world without. That evening, sitting by the fire, he drew from his wallet the picture of Parbutti. Gold and gems adorned her, too.

" What is that, my friend ? " asked the old man, curious as ever.

" This is a likeness of the Goddess Parbutti, worshipped by Hindus."

With a swift exclamation the apothecary crossed himself in alarm.

" Whatever possesses you to own such a thing ? Are you mad ? A *goddess*—Heavens above ! Some heathen Hindu idol ! How dare you risk even having it upon you ? You must be losing your wits ! No, no—don't show it to me. The Virgin protect me ! Here—fling it at once into the fire ! "

" Perhaps I am wrong," said Perroguet slowly, regarding his agitated friend with interest. " Perhaps I have made an error, after all. Yes, now I look at it again I see I was mistaken in the picture. This is a portrait of the famous ballerina : Mademoiselle Fritonelli, no less."

" Ah, that is a very different affair ! You rogue, you ! So you carry the portrait of the charmer. Well, well ! I have heard of her often, who has not ? Let me see it. Wait ; I must first put on my glasses.—Ah, yes, certainly, a face of unspeakable beauty. So calm, so heavenly. Who would have thought it ? A face of the purest and most serene splendour. And all those jewels—a king's ransom ! Doubtless they will be the gifts of her admirers. Yes ; ha, ha, they say she's had lovers of all nations ; even crowned heads, they say, have had the pox of her, the pretty jade ! "

Perroguet pondered long over these conversations.

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Something perplexed him deeply. He could find no answer to it: indeed, he could hardly discover what it was.

II

What with his own problems and what with Hili's problems, life was becoming very complicated. There was, besides, of course, the incessant business of earning one's daily bread.

Fairs always attracted him. Apart from his professional interest and the ready-made audiences, it was always stimulating to see the new things that were continually produced. Everything was modern, up-to-date, latest, lauded as such at the tops of their voices by every single one of the showmen. At the same time nearly everything was centuries old.

The lights, the noises, the happy and laughing people in holiday mood, excited him always: and now, without Hili, he felt more than ever the need for young companionship. Blanchard, the old man, was of course a dear friend, but that was not everything. Life had other gifts. The faces of young girls rose before him, scarlet-lipped, smiling. A glance tossed from dark eyes sent a quiver through his spine, even the eyes of a stranger. He was young still, full of life. Even the apothecary would admit a man was a man. Somewhere in the world there must be a woman he could love, who could love him. . . .

As if this thought had an echo he found to his surprise one face, out of many, that seemed to be always in his sight. At fairs she was there, constantly passing: when he stepped from his lodging she happened to be just crossing the road: when he stood, singing, in the corner of a court she would come up at the end of the song and flash from her eyes a message his racing blood understood. In the press of the crowd he would feel a little pressure on his elbow: there was the merry, bold glance, there were the lips parted in laughter: there for a second, and the next second gone.

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This vision haunted his mind for days : it swam in his dreams and kept away sleep. From the half-animation of Hili's eclipse he rose to a quivering, unreal consciousness, lighted only by the senses and trembling in their dim radiance.

Her name, he discovered, was Mattise. She was gay, men were her slaves. This spoke of itself from her bright, challenging disdain, from her quick contemptuous gait with its swing of coloured skirts. Whether she was alone or with the girl her friend, the eyes of men followed her. That she, of all, should show to him a kindliness appeared to Perroguet an honour and a bliss beyond hope.

Should he speak to her ? Dared he speak to her ? Was she the one destined to share with him everything ? His swinging pulse answered him : yes, if she wished it.

Deliberately he searched all day among the crowds. Would she be there that day, could he still hope ? At that moment she was beside him. With a tremendous effort he conquered his quivering nerves.

"Mademoiselle," he said, bowing exquisitely, "pardon the homage of a stranger. I cannot rest till I know if I may see you again."

The girl flashed a glance of hurried and anxious triumph. She threw up her hand and laid it against his heart. "This evening," she whispered. "At the House of the Goat, on the road to Paget Pelvoux." She vanished at once in the throng.

Exalted, Perroguet felt he could play no more. A wild happiness shook him. That she should speak to him was enough, that she should extend a rendezvous almost passed belief. Carried beyond himself, he left the crowded street at once : he strode to the little inn at the corner, entered, ordered drink. How could he wait till the full close of evening ?

The inn was crowded : there was his friend Blanchard with a few cronies, already a little gone in liquor.

He dared not tell them of his happiness. It was too dear, it was too sacred. He took up his tankard and sat

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beside them in silence. He could scarcely attend to their talk, which was full of laughter and gossip.

"My friend is a stranger," said Blanchard in apology.

Suddenly he was aware a man held him by the sleeve. "A stranger, indeed! That is easily seen. May I ask if I have not observed you in the company of Mattise? —Well, be careful, my friend, that's all I can say."

"Careful? What do you mean?" said Perroguet, his heart bursting.

"Oh, nothing, nothing. Do not look so angry. It is only what all the town knows, she is a little — the fair Mattise! At this moment, I am told—this may be news to you, but it is the common talk of the city—at the moment the poor girl is really desperate, she is actually in the throes of trying to find a father for her child."

Everything went black for a few seconds. A hammer seemed to have struck him, stunning feeling and thought. When light returned he heard the men talking as before, slowly, easily, pointing the stems of their pipes to show some argument. Their deliberate movements, their cheerful voices, the light glinting on their warm cheeks and noses, and fluffing round their clouds of smoke, held him fascinated, tied to these details: suddenly, with a cry, oversetting his glass, he rose to his feet and ran out of the room.

III

'It is because I have not Hili,' thought Perroguet sadly. 'She keeps me sane.' He was filled with a contempt for himself and a disgust with the world. 'I should not have made that mistake if she had been there, the little one.'

He began to calculate.

Father Dolin had said two or three years. Why, she had been there two years already, almost three. Surely, now, they would let her go? Surely by this time a child must have learnt the answers to the cardinal questions, whatever they might be? Which was all, the Father had seemed to say in the beginning, that was necessary

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to save her soul. The Feast of St. Nicholas, too, was soon coming on. What a joy to have her back again for that ! Yes, if her soul was saved by now he would ask if she could not return : for he, Perroguet, could not get on without her. . . .

At Paget Pelvoux he went straight to Father Dolin.

The good priest's manner was suave. Certainly, doubtless, Marie-Céleste could leave the Convent if he wished it, if she wished it : that is, of course, with the consent of the Mother Superior. Naturally, it would depend entirely upon her : she could not be expected to look favourably upon the roving life of a street-player. Still, perhaps something could be arranged. Girls from the Convent were often found good, steady places in farms, or in the houses of the gentry. . . . He did not know whether she had perhaps developed, by this time, some special aptitude for household work. Let Perroguet speak, by all means, to the Mother Superior, she was very amiable and full of good sense.

Perroguet thought of all this as he sat on the Convent bench waiting for Hili to appear. To tell the truth, he was afraid of the Mother Superior : even Sister Auguste humbled him considerably. Well, he would have at least a lovely talk with Hili : that would restore him : after that he would tackle the other.

His hopes fell with her first words.

" Oh, Perro, how can I tell you ? . . . They have made me promise to stay here. Another two years, three years, I don't know. They said I must do just as I wish about it. They said there wasn't any compulsion. But Sister Auguste looked at me. . . . I have been very insubordinate. They told me I was to tell you. . . ."

He was alone, at the edge of the meadow. His cooking was finished, his fire was out. The trees overhung his camping-place, the stars showed through them, out of the pale evening sky. These were the first stars that Hili had loved. ' How can I wait for her for another three years ? How can I live through that endless time ? It

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was better before I had found her, then I knew not what it was I wanted.'

Along the edge of the meadow ran the ribbon of road. Straining towards that bitter path, his gaze crossed ever : its nearness hurt him, and yet soothed him too : it was the road to that yellow building of the Moors : it led to Hili.

In the darkness a flutter came along it. A white bird flying low in the distance, sweeping over the road. He rose wearily, leaning against the tree, brushing away a sad film from his eyes. He should not be rising, he should be making his bed in the grass, he should be thinking of sleep, it was night.

What use was night, when sleep came not, when emptiness alone stretched forward on all sides ? When nothing came into one's heart but a little voice saying "three years"?

A sound quivered from the road. A tap of running feet. A little call like the cry of a lamb or a young kid. From where it came, out of the dusk, the road was hidden, trees were before it. In a second he had crossed the meadow at full speed, stumbling, hoping, knowing not what. The white bird gathered itself out of the gloom and flung itself into his arms.

"*Hili!*"

"I had to come, Perro. I could not stay any more. I went when the gate was opened for them to bring in the water. I ran along the road. I knew I would find you somewhere. Keep me, Perro. Let me stay with you. Are you angry with me for running away ?"

To this there could be no answer. He picked her up, wrapped her in his cloak, and went back to rebuild the fire.

Never had the sun shone brighter, never more gently the breeze, day after day, tempered the turning year.

Munching, they sat in their favourite dining-place, some dell overlooking a stream.

"Perro, I do love you. Before I went to the Convent

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I never thought about it. You were all I could remember. You seemed something big—like the sky. Afterwards, when I was there, and the walls were all round me, and they were cold and of stone, I thought about you over and over. All about the way we talked to each other. As if we had a secret between us. And your hand, that used to help me over the rocky bits. And how I used to ride on your back when I was little. Don't let's ever part again, Perro "

"Not ever again, my darling, while I am alive."

"Oh, Perro, Perro, there's a little green lizard ! Sister Auguste wouldn't let us look at the lizards, she said it was wasting time. She said better than to be idly looking at lizards we could scrub the floor of the chapel. Even if it had only just been done that wouldn't be wasting time, because it would be pleasing the Saints. . . . Oh, Perro, clever, clever ant ! Do you see what he's doing ? "

"Yes, we can watch him well from here. Just hand me that grain of barley, perhaps he will carry it home."

"Oh, I do love you, Perro ! "

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AS soon as he could, he questioned her about her drawing and painting : the dream of their combined achievement was one he had never relinquished. To his grief he found she would not speak of it. He tried her often but it was no use. Nothing that she had learned at the Convent would she attempt to do now : an association of distaste, bewilderment, reprimand, had fallen across the whole.

' Well, give her time,' thought Perroguet. The main thing that was necessary now was to leave the neighbourhood with all speed. He would go to a letter-writer's, he would have a letter sent to the Convent explaining that she had come back to him, that they need not search or be anxious ; and then he and Hili must get away before indeed search could be made, and the little girl perhaps taken from him once more.

Thus they travelled speedily out of Provence, journeying in carts, or on mules, whenever they could get a lift. The very bottom of the wallet was reached by the time Perroguet felt they were safe and that they could relax and continue only the business of living, and the very necessary one of earning money.

It was now discovered that Hili could dance. A few steps of formal dances, a few steps of her own making, a bending and twirling to the tune on the flute, a clap-clapping to the notes of the guitar, a flutter of slender arms, as wish of childish skirts, and at the last a merry little face asking for money to put in the outstretched tambourine.

Thus they attended the fairs, she dancing, he playing. Perroguet had entirely recovered his balance and his

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charming professional manner. All his old songs came bubbling up and flowing back into his heart. It was hardly even necessary to consult, the evening before, the beautifully written pages of Jacob.

They travelled the roads which were cart-tracks, lined with poplars. They passed beside groves of limes and olives. In towns, in the evenings, they strolled among the families sitting at tables in the cobbled streets, drinking the red wine of Navarre. Nearly all the young men and girls knew the topical songs : the twenty or thirty verses of each passed the evenings very delightfully. As a change he would sing them coplas, or old gitano ditties, or the dear Basque ballads themselves.

*Gautier de Formelles, voir
Me repondez d'un qu'parti !
Proé avez et marin et soir
Cette qu'or vos tient a ami :
Six ans de la toz biens avrez,
Après par mesfaits le perdryez :
Ou dix ans de s'amor soufrir
Et pris après toujours joir ?*

Sometimes he gave them those formal questions-and-answers which long ago he had put to music, with an accompaniment for the guitar : in this setting they had acquired a new charm and piquancy. "Lequel est préférable pour un vrai amoureux : connaître les sentiments de sa Belle, ou que celle-ci connaisse le sien ?"—"Les hommes seraient heureux de savoir ce que pensent les femmes. Mais ils ne le savront jamais. C'est précisément ce qui fait leur désespoir !" — This was always well received, especially by the ladies. He would continue with these for perhaps half an hour, always reserving to the last : "L'amour, qui j'ai toujours fidèlement servi, me récompensera-t-il un jour ?"—"Assurément, si vous continuez à le servir loyalement."

Servir loyalement, indeed, seemed to be the note of all these sayings, and something about this appealed to Perroquet. Yet he never omitted that one of Hué and Robert : *Hué* : "Je ne puis recouvrer les bonnes grâces de

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Celle qu j'aime si je ne lui donne grands coups. Me conseillez-vous de le faire ? ”—Robert : “ N'hésitez pas ! ” This was invariably a great success, usually accompanied on the part of the listeners by realistic pantomimic conveyances of *grands coups*.

There was also the famous question of the King of Navarre : “ *Un avant va trouver la dame pour qui il a long-temps soupiré : doit-il, pour lui plaire, lui baiser tout d'abord la bouche ou les pieds ?* ” This seldom failed to throw the crowd into a frenzy of speculation : the accompanying song that elaborated the theme was usually overwhelmed with the advice, the divergent and heated opinions, that flowed in on all sides. Coins flowed in too, so that was all right. Perroquet pocketed them gracefully, thankfully ; and went off to seek supper and bed.

When evenings were chilly and they were still camping in the open, they would light a young cork-tree as in the old days, feeding it with fir-cones and rosemary. There were now, he found, many things he could teach Hili. She seemed anxious to learn, to take her share of the common tasks. He taught her how to boil chocolate with wine, pimento and sugar : how to cook stews in pinellos beside a wood-fire : how to stew the partridges and quail, which were abundant during these years, in one dish with onions and melons : and how to mash rye into a paste nourishing for man and beast. He taught her, too, how to keep water cool by wrapping a damp cloth round the vessel and placing it in the breeze : and in the hot summers, when water was scarce, how to drink from stagnant pools, using your fingers as a filter to prevent the leeches from entering your mouth.

Life was pleasantly uneventful. It was quite a landmark when they were nearly shut out of Soissons, whose gates closed at eleven. It was an interest to see the mails pass ; their postilions carried double-barrelled pistols, and looked very fierce ; the coachmen drove with much speed and fury, changing horses every few leagues. Sometimes they heard news from these people of strange

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happenings elsewhere ; and these, like the sound of the wind and rain heard from a warm fireside, made their own life seem even more calm and secure. Once part of a circus passed, to their infinite interest. Hili could hardly be dragged from the sight of the tiny piebald ponies, and the gaily painted caravans containing who knows what of mystery, to say nothing of the troupe of happy and impudent dogs that invariably appoint themselves as circus followers. "Come along, Hili," Perroguet would say, "we cannot follow them. We, too, have our living to earn." She would come at once. Whatever insubordination she may have shown at the Convent, she always obeyed Peiro implicitly.

Sometimes they stopped to chat with the priests strolling about the countryside with their many mistresses and children : smooth, kindly and smiling they were, with a patriarchal quality that was charming. Perroguet was happy in their society, but Hili was distressed. It seemed to her these fat old men laid down the law, and her beloved Perro listened. Fragments of the half-knowledge from her convent days still clung to her.

"Perro, I don't *understand* about believing. The priests say : Listen to me, if anything is wrong, *I'll* tell you what to do ! As if they knew. Only they."

"Well, darling, isn't that reasonable ? When your body is sick, don't you go to a doctor, put it in his hands, to heal it for you, by his art and God's will ?" Perroguet was careful in his words.

"Yes, but you see, when my body is sick, I know it, I feel bad, I *want* to be cured. If my soul is sick, I don't know, I feel no different, sometimes happier. That time when I was picking the plums in the orchard that were meant for the poor, and ate so many of them instead, that was a dreadful complaint of the soul, Sister said, the sin of greed. I lay awake all night wondering if I would get a disease and come out all over plum-coloured. But I felt very well next day, I was happy too, I was thankful to think that perhaps Sister was wrong. Was she ?"

Perroguet was troubled. "I am the last person to ask

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such a question, my darling. But there is an answer to it, as there is to evrything. Some day we may find it."

Failing her thus, he would think it his duty to inform her mind, as well as he could, on other matters important and modern, facts whose authenticity was beyond doubt. The nuns had been kind and zealous, but they had not enlightened her on the great events of the world. Yet even here, before he had gone very far, Perroquet would find himself bewildered, too.

He told her of the Terror, the guillotine, the fall of the old tradition, the rise of the new. "I was a boy at the time, I remember it well. The world seemed at an end, no one could imagine what could happen next. First they killed the King and all the nobles, then they killed religion: then they made themselves new kings and new gods. But none of them lasted. That was the trouble. Everyone tried to think of some new way to tie them. They renamed everything, even the months, to forget the blood they had shed, lest it should haunt them. Every day a fresh notion arose. There was the Feast of the Supreme Being, à la Robespierre, I remember that. You see, Robespierre imagined himself to be the voice of God and of the people. After he had seen the altars insulted, and the churches thrown down, and public worship abolished, he claimed the merit of having restored to the Supreme Being some share in the arrangement of this universe! Yes, he actually appeared in the Convention as the priest of a new religion, and the destroyer of all who disagreed with him—that is, with God. Well, I don't know, I think he was a vain, cruel madman, that's what *I* think. . . .

"Napoleon, also, considered himself a kind of god, at least he put on the privileges of God—the power to define right and wrong, to kill or to spare, and, above all, to be himself triumphant. And he gave honours, too, to those he favoured. That is, of course, to his own people. See, the crown of Naples goes to his brother Joseph, who afterwards gets Spain too: Holland is handed to his brother Louis: Westphalia to his brother Jerome. But that is

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not enough. He was greedy, Napoleon. He was the greediest man in the world. The sin of greed, darling, is not confined to children."

" Sister Auguste always spoke very well of Napoleon."

" Naturally. He restored the churches. And he was great, too, there's no denying. He made France glorious, all the nations envied her. We sit here in peace, now it is all over, we forget the wonderful victories, and the genius and strategy and courage that brought them about. All those magnificent campaigns he directed single-handed. Egypt, Italy, Spain——"

" Did he have more to eat, after he had conquered Italy? Did he have finer clothes? Why did he wish to conquer countries? He couldn't rule them all himself. You tell me yourself he had to give them away."

" It was for France."

" Did France want it?"

" Naturally France wanted it. France wasn't asked, anyway." For once Perroguet was exasperated. " Besides, they were *all* fighting, can't you understand? I myself witnessed battles with the Spanish and English troops, that is, the enemy. And very gallantly they fought, let me tell you. Yes, honour and glory were theirs, too. Many a desperate position they forced with courage and resource, many a time they repulsed the enemy with terrific slaughter. Sometimes, after a battle, a whole hillside would be covered with dead. . . ."

" Well, God could not have loved *that*. Oh, how very, very angry He must have been with them!"

" But can't you see," said Perroguet testily, "it was their *duty* to kill Frenchmen?"

" Why?" asked the little girl.

C H A P T E R X V I I

YES, it was no good talking to Hili about great matters like campaigns : and Perroguet, with many a wiser man, concluded that women could never be made to understand the arts of politics or war.

Fortunately, other subjects abounded. The rarefied altitudes of ethical beliefs were seldom visited. Indeed, the incessant pursuit of daily bread was their chief concern. As the child grew her needs increased. Perroguet kept his wits alive to hear of and pick up any extra work that helped the exchequer. It was wise to have at least a few spare coins in your wallet that could stay there, safe, for a rainy day. It was fine, too, to feel, when you set out in the morning, that even if you earned nothing, Hili would not be supperless.

At the wine-harvest they offered their labours. It was good work, well paid, and every person, young and old, was welcomed. It was amusing, too, placing the grapes in the conical barrels on each side of the mules that carried them to the pressing-place : everyone laughed and was gay, jokes flew, and labour seemed little. It was better still emptying them into the large square room, with the floor cut in grooves to receive the juice, and dancing on them—old and young, rich and poor, dirty feet or clean, sore or healthy, it was all the same. There was merriment there for all, until the grapes were taken up, squashed in a machine, and only the spirits of wine left, giving off dreadful fumes, so that no one dare go near with a light. . . . After this they would see the Mayor, with all the civil authorities, tasting the wine out of their silver cups, and either giving or withholding the permission for the hoisting of the green bush. If

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the wine was pronounced good, there would be an extra coin or two all round : and all could drink from the barrel into which the leavings were thrown, mixed, and reinforced with water as the level sank. Everyone wished to be the first to sup from this draught, and many sore heads were the consequence : but Perroguet always departed early with Hili, before good tempers soured into bad. And sometimes Hili earned a bit too, riding on the corn-grinder, dragged round and round by mules over the hissing grains. In November, when the olives ripened, they helped to pick and store them. Perroguet was depressed here by an ancient man, his neighbour in the olive-yard, who discoursed wheezily on the transitory nature of life. "Yes, yes, say what you will, we live and die like grass. So that is your foster-child, eh ? Eh, eh, well, you'll soon lose her. No man who has planted an olive has ever eaten the fruit." He was glad when the harvest was over.

Accustomed thus to snatching at every chance that presented of procuring a little extra, especially near the approach of winter, when lodgings had to be hired and money was scarce, he took to hanging about the inns, where rich strangers sometimes stopped a night or two and a job could occasionally be found. His good friend, the host of the Cheval d'Or, often put him in the way of one. To him he went, therefore, as soon as the olive harvesting was done.

"Good Pascal, I know you have a foreign gentleman staying ; can he, do you think, be induced to require my services for anything ? "

"See here, minstrel." Pascal beamed. "Here is a piece of luck for you. It was the very thing I was going to suggest myself. He is a merchant, my gentleman, he wishes a letter sent to his brother, who is also a merchant, somewhere across the range. My gentleman cannot go, he has contracted a chill, he shivers from morning to night. Well, the mail won't pass for another week. Yet his message is urgent. It deals with transactions of money. He asks me, do I know of any reliable

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man who will carry it? But what with one thing and another I can recommend no one. Gregoire is in bed with rheumatism, Simon has cut his foot. There may be plenty of others, but I thought of you. Say, could you do it?"

A few minutes later Perroguet was bowing in his best manner to a tired-looking gentleman in a night-cap, a padded flannel dressing-gown, a muffler and innumerable blankets. Handles of warming-pans stuck out from this mountain of cloth like almonds in a cake.

"Monsieur, I am well acquainted with this country. If you will entrust your message to me it shall be delivered. Reassure yourself, rest in peace, it will be safe as with a King's messenger. As for me, the innkeeper will speak for me, perhaps even the Curé of the village."

Thus it was arranged. Perroguet received the letter, the address and directions. Alas, the journey was farther than he had supposed. Still, what matter? The reward was large in proportion, and he would receive it as soon as he returned.

Pascal's wife arranged to take Marie-Céleste and look after her during the four or five days he would be away. He left money for her provision, taking with him only enough for the journey's needs. "That is wise. Look out for robbers," said Pascal, smiling, "I hear they have been active of late." It was a compliment to Perroguet that robbers should think him, even for a moment, worthy of attention.

With a joyful heart he set out. A piece of luck it was, indeed. This little fortune that awaited him, well tended, would see them through the worst times of the winter: and how quickly earned, how easily!

Unfortunately, quite at the start he made a mistake. The short cut proved, as these so often do, the longest way round in the end. Three days had passed before even the outskirts of the town of Alimantes had been reached. Then the brother's house was not easy to find. 'A rich merchant, a rich brother, a large, imposing house,' thought Perroguet, hoping to see such at every turn.

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It seemed to his tired legs that the town retreated as fast as he approached it.

At last he fell in with a cattle-drover to whom he showed the letter and address. "Well, you're certainly coming from the wrong direction," said he: "this residence is a good three leagues on the other side of the town!"

Nevertheless, his company lightened the journey: for he knew, like all countrymen, the history and inhabitants of all the places they passed. A high castle overlooked the valley—"The home of the Baron d'Estremont," said the drover; "a pity his lordship had married again, and one more than half his age, a foreigner too! And so much beneath him in dignity, it didn't do," said the drover simply; "she was just like a child with her love for gee-gaws and vanities. Whereas, over there, on the opposite slope, lived a very different combination. . . ." Thus, with this and that, the journey passed, and at length, to his infinite relief, Perroguet was able to give up the letter to the merchant's brother and start again on the homeward journey.

It was on his way back that he decided to take the steep track through the gorge. It was not so much that he feared to lose his way once more on the route he had previously taken, but that now, owing to the delay, his money was gone; so that it was imperative to return with all speed, for, as he suddenly realised, he had only enough food for one more day.

It was midday as he entered that rocky defile.

Yet in a few moments the sunshine seemed to be lost. The rocky walls rose at one step as the path fell sharply down, while a cold air laden with mist came up from the unseen depths below. That was where he must descend. . . . All at once the whole ravine intersecting that side of the range seemed to possess an aspect of savage loneliness that caught the breath, that invited the mind to conjure atrocities. . . . And sure enough, looking around, he saw, just at the corner of the path, the sign indicating the place of the commission of a

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murder—a wooden cross, a crude painting of a gibbet, a little cairn of stones. “Robbers have been active lately,” said Pascal’s voice pleasantly. ‘But robbers wouldn’t waste their time on *me*,’ thought Perroguet, his heart pounding. He tried to hum a little tune. That made it worse, the rocks echoed it so vilely. He fell silent.

A feeling that something was just going to happen grew ever more strongly upon him. At each turn he looked to the whole visible length of the road before he advanced : though what he expected he knew not.

And then, when he came to it, he knew. The moment he saw it he felt no surprise : he felt merely that this was what had been waiting for him : with a confusion of tangled images in his mind, stamps of the past, he hurried forward.

Where the path turned, beside a heap of boulders, a broken and collapsed figure was sitting at the foot of a rock. A box lay beside him, and a staff.

It took only a second’s glance to show him it was Andrea.

“Andrea ! My dear friend ! At last ! To find you like this ! This is bad, but good, too !” He embraced him urgently. “What has happened ? Are you hurt ? Who has hurt you ?”

Andrea lifted his head. A smile creased his face into a thousand wrinkles : it was followed at once by a spasm of pain. “Malditos ladrones !” he murmured.

“But when ? How ? What happened ? Where is your servant, that strong young man ?”

“Fled.” He looked up the rocky passage. He moved his shoulder but did not lift his arm.

Perroguet looked at him carefully. The sleeve of his coat was torn and bloody, and his legs seemed twisted curiously. “Andrea !—I can only thank heaven that guided me here !” He stopped. How much there was to exchange between them since their last meeting ! But Andrea was too weak for many words and he was bleeding. With indescribable feelings Perroguet tore off his scarf and began to bind his arm. In his own tongue, a

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word or two at a time, brokenly, Andrea told him. The bandidos had come on them suddenly, the evening before, as they toiled up the slope. They had taken all his money, rifled his pack, and belaboured him. What can one do against bandits, armed with English muskets picked up from the wars, and good Toledo blades? Why they had not killed him outright no one could know. At their first appearance Amorós had fled. He had lain all day wishing to die. He could not move, his leg was broken.

Perroquet thought swiftly. Andrea must not spend another night there: that would finish him. In any case, he must have attention for his leg, only someone skilled could set a broken limb. Yet he could not carry him, even on his back, up that treacherous slope, without fear of disaster. How get him away, then? A mule, or a donkey. Yes, but how get that? Between them, they had no money. Even if he ran at top speed back to the town he had just left, no one on earth would give him, a stranger, a donkey to take away, without payment. To take to a wounded friend in a valley of robbers, to pay for the loan of it some day or other—what a likely tale! No, that would be laughed at. Hold, there was the merchant's brother, he was not altogether a stranger, he was rich, he would help, *he* would know he was honest, the letter itself must have proved it. The merchant's brother, then. But alas, hold, again: he lived three leagues on the other side of the town. That would take too long: he would not get there by daylight. Someone on *this* side of the town, then . . . Suddenly a fine scheme came to him. It was hateful to leave Andrea, thus newly refound, but he must, if he would save him.

"There is only one way out of it," said Perroquet. "See, I will make you as comfortable as I can. This shall be for your head. Here is a stone—gently, gently—to go under your knees, and covered with earth, see, so it won't be sharp. My coat will keep you a little warm; here is my knapsack, rest your elbow on that;

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the cheese and the bread are here, look, just under your hand, can you raise it to your mouth? How I do wish I had some wine. Take heart, Andrea. See, you will laugh in a minute, because I shall look so unprofessional! I am going to change places with you."

He picked up Andrea's pack, fixed the strap awkwardly over his forehead and, without wasting any more daylight, set off.

The light was little enough in that rocky chasm between the hills : at the turn of the road, looking back for an instant, he could see no more of Andrea than a pale triangle which was his face and the white streak of the scarf tied on his arm. The rest was lost against the darkness of the rocks. He waved his free hand and shouted encouragingly : the desolate region echoed with a fantastic diminuendo.

He set his teeth and advanced with resolution, his eyes fixed on the narrow ascending path. He dared not look around, for suddenly the caves and dark places that formerly were no more than shades on the painted scene seemed now to show only the perfect nests for robbers. At the steepest and darkest part of the passage he passed again that sinister cairn. . . . But at least, when there, he was nearing the end.

At last he came out of the pass, the path abruptly turning West. At once he was in sunlight. On the distance below him lay on the air a faint haze of smoke and a blur of roofs. Darkness and danger as if by magic were left behind. He sat down in the warm westerly light, thankful to be able to remove the strap from his aching head. Evidently for that sort of portage you had to have long practice and special muscles. He opened the pack.

It held, as he had noticed at first, quite a lot of things still. But as he examined them his heart sank again. Here was nothing of much practical utility. No pocket-knives, spoons, tapes, hooks, buttons, thread : these the bandits had taken or thrown away : only some German toys, a few glass ornaments, a couple of carved Spanish

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combs, a book of household recipes, some painted shells representing historical scenes, one or two coils of false hair, several tin mouldings of churches, one silver mouse-trap, a tiny pair of scissors with chased-brass handles, a quantity of glittering imitation jewellery, and a number of rolls of silver ribbon. These were things bought but sparingly by the ordinary citizen and only at times of fête. Well, it made his course only more plain. All, or nothing.

First he arranged the pack as a tray as he had seen Andrea do many a time. He put the gaudiest of the toys out upon it, with the most brilliant glasses, chains and brooches. It looked well, very fine, very taking indeed : all the same, something was lacking. A travelling pedlar he seemed, like hundreds of others. A thought illuminated him. Taking up the little scissors, he cut the roll of silver ribbon into strips, making a glittering sling to go round his neck and serve as a tray support. Of the rest he made a dozen small bows, and pinned them round the edges of the tray. This at once changed the whole appearance of affairs. A little was left over : suddenly, deftly, he twisted it into a cockade and pinned it into his hat. Thus bedizened, he advanced on Alimantes.

Before he had gone two furlongs the country children were thronging around him. Their cries brought their mothers to stand in surprise at their cottage doors. "Hey, hey, pedlar, what are you selling ?"

"Nothing for you today, mother." He grinned charmingly, but his anxious eyes searched the horizon.

At last, on the western slope, he saw what he sought ; the words of the drover came comfortingly back to him, renewing his hope. Turning off to the right, he began the laborious ascent to the Castle.

The sunlight of the dying day seemed to grow brighter than ever as he rose. A long avenue, flanked by trees, led straight to the main door of the building : but to gain it you had to pass first through the tall, guarded, ornamental gates. This passage he dared not attempt. Fortunately, before he got there, he saw a short cut

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through the pasture used by cattle. This led alongside the avenue, though at a lower level: here he passed swiftly, examining the overgrown bank for any opening that might communicate with the main approach. In large houses, with many servants and intrigues, there is usually some way of slipping in and out unobserved. . . .

And there it was, a rough footpath, almost unnoticeable among the shrubs. In a minute Perroguet had climbed up by this, finding himself, as he had hoped, in the midst of the trees that bordered the drive. Now for the next move. He advanced cautiously, eyes in every part of him; you never knew what might turn to advantage. Two small gates, right and left, indicated the boundaries of the formal gardens, behind them showed a glimpse of autumn trees, a rainbow of spray thrown up by a fountain, and here and there an upraised classic arm.

The avenue was empty, he gained it easily: at the end, near the big door of the Castle, a servant passed, hurrying, carrying water for the house.

"Have the goodness to ask the major-domo to request her ladyship to examine the wares of a world-famous pedlar. (And there will be a little something for you also.)"

The servant stared in astonishment. The water on his shoulders slopped over the rim and splashed down sparkling on his clothes. He did not speak. "And hurry up, my friend, or you will drown yourself," said Perroguet sharply. The time that was so precious was passing. Had he misjudged? He had staked all on this throw. The servant turned and went away into the house.

The next moment a very ancient and severe-looking individual appeared at the entrance. He charged towards Perroguet blindly, like a bull at a red cloak. "Be off this instant!" he roared in an angry voice of surprising power. "What colossal impertinence to come up to the very door of the Castle! Whatever is the world coming to! Be off before I set the grooms on you! Get—"

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"If you will have the kindness to request the Baroness—"

"The *Baroness*! She would not see you. She does not traffic with pedlars. She cannot endure the very sight of a pedlar! She—"

"Precisely. Exactly. I perceive both you and your mistress have great good sense and discernment. But you will see for yourself, gifted sir, I am not an ordinary pedlar." Perroquet felt wretchedly nervous. His smile twitched uncomfortably. He could see only Andrea lying in the gorge with the night closing over. . . .

The old man, in spite of his ferocity, was short-legged and short-sighted. Advancing all this time, he now came up to Perroquet and beheld him suddenly in the full light from the West, sparkling all over in points of silver fire, his tray before him covered with coloured toys, bright tinware and glassware, glittering and glowing.

"H'm," he said, a little taken aback, rubbing his hand through his beard. "Extraordinary, certainly. Though that makes it no better. A play-actor, I suppose, of some kind. I cannot see—"

Just at that instant the lady appeared, coming through the rows of trees at a little distance, a companion behind her. She saw at a glance that something unusual was going on; with the eagerness of a child she came swiftly towards them.

"How often have I told you, François, that I *adore* pedlars? Why can you *never* remember that? And look at this one—why, what an enchanting apparition! Nothing like this has come up before from the valley. You must indeed have something worth selling! Let me see, let me see. Look, Berthe, what a queer little thing this is, a flower under a glass dome! Oh, oh, a little white mouse covered with fur—listen, it squeaks! I must see what is inside—"

"Let us at least," said Berthe in a deep voice, "not stand in the avenue."

"Certainly. One cannot see so well here. Come, follow me. This is lovely. The garden will do very

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well. Come, pedlar, here is a stone seat. You shall set up your tray before it and show me every one of your wares."

She sat down bubbling with pleasure. The old servant retreated, taking up a position behind the lady, over whose head his strongly disapproving features appeared sourly. One glance at the Baroness explained his indignation. She was blonde, not of the country, a bride, brought perhaps from the Rhine; her fair hair still fell in two plaits over her shoulders, and her plump pink face beamed with unstudied delight at the gratification of her pleasure, gained at whatever abuse of the ancient proprieties.

Perroquet showed her this and that. She clapped her pink hands; she bought everything. "See, Madame, these exquisite combs for the coiffure, they come from a far country, where they are worn only by the most beautiful females. . . . Examine this mouse-trap, so elegant for a bedroom, so indispensable for a lady of high position: see, the mouse comes for the flour-powder, the lard of grease, the tomato-butter, all the necessities of the toilet—ha, ha, the little thief is caught without trouble. . . . You will take it? Brava! The price, you will agree, is absurdly small. . . . Observe these glass birds-of-paradise with long spun-glass tails. Are they not alive? Do not their bills appear to whistle entrancingly? And what a decoration they make of themselves. You place them on the edge of a wine-glass—stay, I will show you with this card: behold, they balance firmly, their tails, glittering, descend in cascades. Ho, what a magnificent ornament for the dinner-table. Without any doubt they bring the glades of the forest to your feasting, the song of birds in the lights of June."

"I'll have the lot," cried the girl.

Perroquet felt quite carried away with his own eloquence. His tongue flowed nimbly. He demanded sums he would have blushed even to think of in any other mood. Within a few minutes the whole remaining stock,

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the shells, the tin churches, even the false hair, was cleared : at last he was rapidly unpinning and selling her the silver bows from the sides of the tray, and the very cockade from his hat. Only some odd scruple of prudence restrained him from parting with the pack itself.

The major-domo's face looked furious, but he could do nothing. His yellow stockings flashed his indignation, obliged, as he was, to walk back to the Castle with both his arms filled with gee-gaws.

Perroquet parted courteously with the lady. He gave her his most excellent bow, and stalked away down the very middle of the avenue with great dignity, flinging a coin to the water-carrier as he passed.

As soon as he had turned the corner he ran at top speed. The shadows were lengthening.

Reaching the little cluster of village houses, with all possible haste he procured a donkey. Alas, too much of the fair Baroness's money disappeared in this transaction . there was no time to bargain : the donkey-owner, scenting an emergency, appeared to possess as little conscience over prices as Perroquet.

He leapt on the animal and sped it forwards. Clop-clop, it struck out bravely for the head of the pass. With the force of his own mind he seemed to lift it on at every stride. 'Oh, kind Saints, let it not get dark too soon. Keep the night away. Keep the wolves away. Don't let him die like Sebastian, before I can help him.'

A bird swooped in the evening sky. 'A vulture?' thought Perroquet, sick with fears. He looked up, screwing his eyes. No, an eagle : sweeping to its home. Ah, that is all right. Eagles are not the birds of death. Eagles take only rabbits and new-born lambs. A man is safe from eagles. . . . He thought of the birds in the frozen passes tearing the bodies of the fallen. The thought racked him. Supposing Andrea was dead, after all, when he reached him ? The upturned face of Sebastian swam continually in his mind, melting into the face of Douglas.

At that moment the donkey stumbled.

It was almost pitch-dark now in the narrow and rocky

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defile. Above the black outline of the hills a clear sky floated, sprinkled with the first stars, but its light glimmered only faintly over the boulders with which their path was strewn. At every step some foothold danger threatened. Supposing the donkey fell, was hurt, lamed —all would be lost. Better to be late than to hasten and be lost !

He dismounted and led the beast. The stones scattered and clattered under their feet : the echo brought the sound again from above, from all round, and a cold sweat broke out at the thought of robbers. How easy for them, now it was dark, to descend swiftly with their muskets and their good Toledo blades

An everlasting age the journey seemed to take. Whenever they came to an awkward turn, or a darker shadow, or a jutting rock, the ass stopped altogether, sticking its forefeet out, raising its ears, and rolling its eyes back.

With all his force Perroguet bastinadoed it. "Coward and imbecile !" he cried, "are we to spend all night in this ravine for your pleasure ?" His rage at the donkey engulfed his fear of the bandits.

At last they reached Andrea.

"Hola, Andrea ! ho, ho !" shouted Perroguet desperately, recklessly, shattering the echoes. Andrea was quite still, very cold, but alive. With great trouble, in the darkness, groaning from his broken leg, he was hoisted on to the donkey's back.

They started the long journey out of the defile. For some reason Perroguet now felt utterly joyous, almost light-headed. The darkness, the steepness, the difficulty, could not oppress him. Sometimes he led the donkey, sometimes he thumped him from behind. But the ass, his nose towards home, went well.

It was just after midnight when they reached the village inn.

'I've practically purchased this donkey already,' thought Perroguet ruefully the next morning, handing the hireling over to its owner. 'It was a good donkey, a

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clever donkey,' he thought, flushed with the triumphant issue of the adventure. Looking at it calmly by morning's light, he saw it was beautiful and powerful.

For two days Andrea lay weak from exposure and loss of blood. His leg was set and a recovery assured, but for all that, Perroguet could not find the heart to leave him. Not only did he realise there was much he could do for his friend that would be done less well by a stranger, but there was also a long journey of the past to make up between them.

"Sebastian is dead, Andrea."

They talked of that and of the strangeness of death and of the chances of peace as of wars, of how they three had been together at Paget Pelvoux, and all that had happened to them since.

And Perroguet told the whole history of Hili. Andrea listened with interest and amusement. His body being inert gave an added quality of movement to his voice, his tongue, his eyes. Perroguet spoke, as always to friends, truly, without constricting his heart. "Andrea, you could not guess what a difference such things make. Sometimes I am so happy I cannot contain my joy: sometimes I am tormented with anxiety lest we have no bread for the morrow—I, who never used to care for anything beyond the day! Sometimes, too, I am attacked by strange unorthodox ideas, concerning beliefs, for instance, I, who never bothered my head about it, but took all as it came, believing what I was told and not caring much either way: and sometimes, Andrea, I am so sad I cannot let my mind think. For who would look after her if I should die?"

"You? Fear nothing. You will never die, my friend. Yours is a character that cannot help living for ever. For you are as old as faith and as new as doubt. Perhaps you would like me to say as old as doubt and as new as faith? You are as solid as the hills and just as stubborn, and at the same time as changeable as the wind that plays over them. You are as superstitious and, yes, as faithful, as any old shepherd who has never left his

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pasture: and yet as free and sceptical as the cunning bright brains of Paris in the new century! Yes, I think they both meet in you, Perroguet."

'You must be rambling in fever,' thought Perroguet simply. He could not see himself as all these grand things. He thought of his flute and wondered if Andrea would mind him playing a little upon it. But Andrea seemed to like talking.

"So you have found a girl-child. Do not let her absorb you, Perroguet. Do not let her eat up your mind. Never forget, a woman contains both sexes in one. Not only in her body, though that is strange enough, that she can make a male thing out of her female body. But in her mind. It is insatiable, it is filled with sympathetic sensations which are at the same time your own. She can run through her life and yours too. She is the final octopus, my friend, all things drown in that whirlpool."

'Whirlpool, octopus, he's raving,' thought Perroguet. "You talk," he said, "but you have not seen her, my little girl."

"I talk, my friend, because I have observed women. But you, after all, may be different. Yes, I will see this child of yours. A fine, innocent pair of simpletons I have no doubt you must be."

A spasm of pain crinkled his brown face. Perroguet hastened to make his position a little easier. There was not much one could do, the pain had to be borne until the wound healed. . . .

"No, you will never die, Perroguet. She will die, if anyone. You have one elixir—luckiness. . . ."

He lay back exhausted. 'It must tire him to talk,' thought Perroguet. He drew out his flute cautiously. Before he could decide to play on it, Andrea went on.

"I have travelled. I have read. I have talked to many. What did Napoleon ask when appointing a new General? *Is he lucky?* Yes, that's it. Some men are lucky, they win the prizes. Of course, they have brains, even genius—who denies it? But here and there you find men who also have brains, even genius, and who

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win nothing, from whom the world takes, not gives, stealing from them at last even their faith in themselves. Your father—he was an artist. He was poor, he could hardly live. He could have told you."

'Yes, my father was poor,' thought Perroguet, musing. He laid his flute on his knee.

As if in answer to the movement Andrea's eyes shifted, a smile crossed them. "Yes, play your flute, Perroguet, when you are puzzled or unhappy. You are wise. You ask from music that she shall console *you*, you do not give yourself as to a cruel, exacting mistress. . . ."

"Or octopus?" asked Perroguet lightly. Andrea seemed not to hear him. His gaze was fixed on some inner vision, he spoke in a low voice, hoarsely.

"See now. You paint a picture—you write a poem. The thoughts of all your days and nights, the very air you breathe, has gone into it: the flame of it consumes and exalts you. You have taken life itself and spread that on the canvas; you have pressed it, living, into words made of crystal. And not just life but the purest, highest essence of life. You shake as you contemplate what you have created, which is about to be freed upon the world. . . . Nobody looks at it or reads it. Your picture is not hung, even in the local gallery. Your poem is considered worth nothing. The world, full of those who do not observe, fails to recognise life when it appears. Your brother-in-law's second cousin, who has a poor mind, considers your work improper. At last its only use is to wrap a cabbage.—Never mind. Try once more. What's a failure or two? Sincerity, toil, true inspiration, these must triumph in the end. Well, you know, after a time it's knock, knock, knock on the head. It's hard to keep on giving your best, it's hard to keep faith in yourself. Particularly when you have not enough to eat. And there is always that little devil dodging about in your mind—you are inferior, he says, everyone is a better man than you. Admit it, ha, ha!—It is so easy to listen to that devil, he is always there with his whisperings."

"How do you know all this?" asked Perroguet, aghast.

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"Well, well, I know, I travel, I see. I am a ship's rat, my friend. But you, Perroguet, you will never feel like this. Even if anything terrible should happen to you, you will never lose faith : that is, faith in your luckiness. And I shouldn't be surprised if in the end your luckiness draws you clear."

"Clear of what ?" cried Perroguet, thoroughly bewildered.

"Well, my friend, that I don't know. I can't see everything. I just feel, that's all. Thoughts come to me, sometimes one thing, sometimes another. Let us say I was a neglected genius in a previous life, and give you now the advice from my experience. Well, well, let me now have a little water. I must sleep again."

The next morning, as if he had been continuing the conversation in his dreams, Andrea remarked : "And there's just one more thing I'd like you to remember, you and the other young simpleton. A wolf was asked : 'For what art thou following these poor little sheep ?' He replied : 'The dust upon which they tread is good for my poor little eyes.' Give me at least, Perroguet, the pleasure of thinking you will remember there are wolves."

"There is, ahem, something else which I wish to give you," said Perroguet, who had been listening with impatience. "Or, rather, not perhaps *give* you, since after all it was purchased with your money. But it is better than wolves, believe me."

Trembling with pleasure and excitement, he led the donkey into the room. Its grey coat was well polished, its hoofs were shining and black with oil, its ears were nicely dusted, its muzzle glistened with health, and a particularly melodious bell, over which Perroguet (forgetting that Andrea was, in any case, tone-deaf) had taken immense pains, was slung at its neck on a chain of flat, blue china beads.

"This donkey, at least," said Perroguet, "will not run away and leave you at the first hint of trouble, like the dastard Amorós!"

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Andrea looked up. For the first time, his eyes filled with tears. "No ; perhaps he will not have the sense."

When Perroguet returned the first thing he saw was Hili dancing up and down in the court of Pascal's Inn.

"Oh, Perro, you *have* been long ! The Circus has come here since you were away. The Circus is here now. Oh, Perro, I've been longing for you to come back. Can we go to the Circus now, at once, this evening ? "

C H A P T E R X V I I I

I

O^F course, next morning it was out of the question to attend to work. No doubt the sun had risen, somewhere oxen drew ploughs, shops opened, but that seemed to pass in some everyday world which lay far beneath them. The fantastic, infinitely pleasing images of the Circus still filled their minds. Hili had never seen anything like them before, Perroguet not for years. It was the rich reward of the letter's delivery that had enabled them to indulge, for the first time, in a bought amusement. To Hili it opened a magical universe. All night long her head had hummed with galloping horses, and with the little dogs that had been so funny ; the brilliant flares had swung enchantingly, the lady in spangles, too good to be true, had obligingly repeated her incredible gymnastics to the ran-tan-tan of a tireless band. . . . Somewhere another world existed where impossible things happened, where people were strong and beautiful, and animals clever and human. Her thoughts ran continually towards it.

And Perroguet, too, felt restless and excited. Say what you will, there was something about a circus that couldn't be put into words. He caught Hili's eye and he knew what they both felt. By common consent, as if drawn by a magnet, they strolled, hand in hand, after breaking their fast, towards the big heath at the edge of the town where, under the coloured canvas, lived incredibly the apparitions of last night's dreams.

The mood to stare, to wonder, and to applaud was still upon them. The thought of the necessity of daily bread had hustled itself out of sight. This feeling seemed to

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have spread throughout the town. Although it was the middle of the morning people were yawning and scratching their heads, and staring about them and gossiping. "Did you see the lions of Gomez? Why, there was a sight! Little Georges has been weeping all night in case one day he should be eaten. I told him only if he steals the sugar again. Well, there it is, one has to say something to children. But that Gomez, marvellous doesn't describe him. Did you see how—"

These conversations were very pleasing to the two, chiming with their mood. And passing the wall alongside the town-hall, to their great interest, they came on one of the big placards of the Circus itself.

A horse's head surmounted it, looking out from a hoop made of the flags of all nations; above it, two crossed whips rose haughtily, below it flamed the words: CIRQUE LOPEZ. Underneath this, in coloured letters of varying sizes, was written:

"Signorita Rosita de la Plata, die erste Jockey, Reiterin der Welt, aus Süd-Amerika. Circus: Variété bühnen, reisenden Theater und Schaustellungen. Acróbatas, caballos, elefantes. Togonif, le nain fameux, avec ses chevaux mignons. Le Troupe Adonis avec les athlètes merveilleux, dans une acte magnifique. Le Grand Carrousel. Bertrand, le Bossu Bizarre, avec les vingt Chats Humains: faut le voir, e bem extraordinario. Chefredacteur: Senhor Laramendi Rosello y Lopez, (Lisbon). Redacteur: H. Kranz, (Dusseldorf). Champ Elysées. Cirque D'été, tous les Soirs. Matinées, Dimanches, et Fêtes."

Below this again was a picture of a clown in an eyeglass and top-hat: the former very much too large and the latter incredibly too small.

This remarkable production struck ecstasy into the hearts of both observers. They stared, equally absorbed, at the flaming colours, the queer words, and the exquisite comedy of the clown. And there was something else. At the very bottom, attached to the poster, was a notice announcing laconically that a vacancy occurred in the

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band for a piccolo. Kindly apply in person between twelve and three to Senhor Lopez. Only trained musicians considered.

Hili saw it first. It was nearest her. She could not speak. She slid her hand into Perroguet's and pressed it hard. This was to force him to read the little notice, to feel as she did, to accept, to get the place, to join the Circus (and take her, of course) : and it was also (by the very hardness of the squeezing) to prevent it from hurting too much if he did not do any of these things.

Perroguet stooped. He read the notice, too—with difficulty, for it was not printed, but written, and not too well. At the same moment that he grasped it in all its implications, he became aware that his fingers were gripped in a burning little vice, and that a pleading face, almost eclipsed by its own tremulous hope, was upturned towards him.

He looked at it ; eye to eye. Without a word said, the secret message passed on a beam steady as light. Each knew the other confessed, in his heart, the pungent, ineradicable love.

'Piccolo, h'm,' thought Perroguet. Elixir—*luckiness*, said Andrea's voice. 'Well, it begins to look like it,' he thought.

Without a word, without changing their original direction, they proceeded to the Circus-plot.

The home of Senhor Lopez was easily discernible, his name swung aloft on every possible structure: but as to where he himself actually resided, that was not so easy to determine. The whole place seemed half asleep, no one stirred except a mangy dog or two come out from the town ; without prying behind the canvas it was going to be impossible to find out anything. At last a man passed carrying a bucket of water and a fork.

"Would you have the goodness to inform me of the whereabouts of Senhor Rosello y Lopez ? "

The man understood only the name : he pointed over his shoulder with the fork to a small tent in the distance.

Towards this they hastened. A buzz of noise came

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forth from it as they approached. At last they were before it. It was closed all round, there was no window to look through, no door on which to knock. 'What does one do with a tent?' wondered Perroguet. He did not like to intrude without invitation, yet he could not bear to think of all those others being engaged before him. He raised his voice, therefore, and shouted in a musical manner: "Hola, ho la-la-la, hola, hola!"

A part of the wall of the tent seemed to slip aside, and a large pale face appeared in the opening. Perroguet bowed to it. "I wish to see Senhor Lopez, if you please. I have come on a very important matter. It is with regard to the—"

"Senhor Lopez is not here. He is never here at this time of day."

"But—but it expressly stated that one was to call at this hour. In person, it said. I have come to offer myself for the vacant position in the band. Who are you, if you please? Where can I find Senhor Lopez?"

"Never mind who I am. As for the master, you must be a fool if you think he ever attends to such details himself. Besides, who would engage you? A man who cannot even enter decently into a tent. A man who bellows outside. In any case, the successful applicant has practically been chosen already."

At this moment an increased uproar within the tent caused the pale face to return hurriedly to its duties. The tent wall flapped down again, but not completely; from the shouts that emerged, carrying threats of pugnacity, it was clear that at least six candidates considered themselves the chosen one. Their claims of merit rang angrily on the air. No one took any more notice of Perroguet. 'Am I a fool?' he wondered. 'It is true I can scarcely play the piccolo, but I thought in a place like this they would hardly know that from a flute. Still, while the choice is not yet decided, I have a chance.' He raised his voice again, adding to the din. As the pale face was just the other side of the canvas, his cry was almost in its ear. Just then Hili tugged his hand. Looking round, he saw

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coming towards them a small, bright, energetic little man. Some heaven-sent instinct enlightened him. Whipping round, he bowed gracefully. "Bons dias, Senhor," he remarked in good Portuguese. "I have the honour to come to take over the vacancy in your orchestra. I am a flautist from the Opera House in Lisbon, under Senhor Yquentos."

The tent flapped back, the pale face thrust out at his elbow.

"Lisbon? *Yquentos?* *de veras?* You are engaged," said the stranger. The pale features almost burst in a paroxysm of despair. "But, Senhor, you cannot. I have here eleven men, all noted players of the piccolo, some of whom already think I have engaged them. How can I refuse them now? They were but waiting for the final choice."

"Don't bother me, Kranz. Get rid of them. I've engaged this man, didn't you hear? If he's no good, get rid of him too. And you—go in there and discover your duties."

In this high-handed manner Perroquet found himself taken on for service with the Cirque Lopez.

II

The first performance that day was a nightmare to him.

"You'll just be in time," Kranz had whispered to him angrily, evidently still sore at his summary engagement. "If you want any dinner, there's the food-tent. Hurry up, there isn't long before the flag goes down. Yes, take your brat with you if you like. Food's plentiful, anyway. Then come straight back to me, here: the bandmaster will speak to you. Heaven knows what your playing's like. If you're no good, out you go.—I think perhaps I won't tell the others they're not wanted until afterwards. H'm. Well. Get off with you. Nothing can be done for another hour."

Perroquet and Hili went to a tent over which a flag flew bearing the word "Hotel"; here at the entrance they paused, a little uncertain. Within, planks on

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trestles formed a long narrow table, littered with dirty plates and scraps of food, and flanked on both sides by benches : the ground underfoot was trodden almost bare of grass, and was stained and burnt with messes and hot liquids : the air reeked with the warm leafy smell of canvas and the mingled odours of foods. At one end a great deal of sloshing and slushing and a high-pitched screaming voice indicated that a washing of dishes was going on amid revelations of an acrimonious nature : at the table itself three people only were seated—two rough, dirty-looking youths and a proud, thin lady with a pale yellow skin, a fiery eye, and an instep that resembled a racehorse.

Before they had time to absorb all these details a man just inside the tent opening caught Perroguet roughly by the arm. "Here, what are *you* doing here ? Get out of this ! "

"I—er, my friend—Senhor Lopez, or, rather, his manager, Herr Kranz—"'

"It's all right, Buffon. It's the new bandsman. I heard the Senhor speaking to him," cried one of the youths casually. The lady did not look up.

"Well, bring your billet with you another time," said the man surlily. "Yet you need not. I shall not forget you. What, who is this ? Your daughter ? All right, all right. Go in and be quick."

They entered and sat at the table. No one took any notice of them, the shrill voice at the other end just behind the canvas shutter continued as before. Perroguet looked around the board. Here and there stacks of plates were heaped, with spoons and knives, and in the centre a half-emptied dish or two still stood. "Evidently one helps oneself," he said. He drew dishes and plates towards him and soon ladled out a substantial-looking stew, to which he added boiled rice from another platter. They both fell to, catching each other's eye, enjoying hugely this unusual meal and their surroundings. The food was good too, rich and juicy : before he had emptied his plate Perroguet had his eye on a dish up the table in which he

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thought he could discern grapes : but ere he could reach for this a whistling thud sounded above their heads, and the lady, who was the only other occupant of the tent, rose at once, without finishing her spoonful, and with an extremely proud, bored air, looking neither to right nor left, advanced towards the tent opening. Just as she passed Hili she stopped, seeing her for the first time : her look brightened at once into pleasure and surprise : so she stood, for a moment, not speaking, then with a swish of her sequined skirt against her tall riding-boots she passed out with a firm tread into the sunshine. Almost at once a red face (owner, it seemed, of the upbraiding voice) appeared from behind the shutter at the end. "Time's up," it said. " Didn't you hear ? "

Perroquet and Hili rapidly left the tent, and went back to where Kranz had bidden them attend him. Here, after a long wait, the bandmaster appeared. What a title for him ! True, he conducted the band in a kind of fashion, but also he appeared to have innumerable other duties, cares and responsibilities and a dreadful fear that finally these would submerge him altogether. He seemed terrified of Kranz, of the Senhor, of the public, and of his ever-growing family, to which he made some painful references even on this his first interview with the new instrumentalist.

" Ah, so you are here. The piccolo, the piccolo, just what we are wanting. Have you been here long ? Did Kranz see you waiting for me ? I—I am sorry I could not get here before. My wife, with her accursed tongue, it was she—— Well, who engaged you ? Senhor Lopez ? Ah, ah, I see. Well, we will not need to try you over in that case. Just take your music. Let me see now—piccolo, piccolo. Where is that part ? I'm sure I put it here in my bag. I'm positive I put it here, only the other day, when the man died. Left us, that is to say. That is how Herr Kranz prefers us to put it. By the way, he died of consumption—have you your own instrument ? That's right—wiser, much wiser. There's no knowing with these consumptions—now where is that part ? Is it

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possible, great heavens ! it is remotely possible that that is what the miserable child Francis was tearing up this morning. Eleven of them, I beg you to believe, eleven bawling children all to be fed and clothed. Heaven knows why I have been singled out thus. They say it's in your stars. Well, I wish the stars would feed them, then ! Yes, it must have been Francis. I can't find it anywhere. Never mind. It does not matter. All you need do is follow the cornet. That is, follow the cornet after the first trumpet has given the signal. You'll remember that, will you ? Five long notes starting from middle C. Then you must play with your might and main, for the cornet's rather weak there. I think something is blocking the high register, and the Senhor likes a good deal of noise in that part. For that is where the little ponies come in and trot round the arena, so you must be very careful with your time, as they are supposed to trot to it ; but of course you must adapt your time to *them*, and play as loudly as you can too, so that this shall be clearly noticed by everyone. But above all, I entreat you, stop instantly at the necessary moment, the cornet stops a few bars before you do, I'm not sure how many, I could tell you in a second if your part hadn't been torn up—but above all, I repeat, don't overlap the drums ; all the instruments stop suddenly and the drums are heard alone at the moment when the ponies stand up on their hind legs. If one single sound is heard from you at this time the Senhor will throw you out. Of course, then, you must remember, too, you have an important part when the cats come in : *miow* you have to go on your instrument, it is very amusing, but be careful and get it in the right bar or you will put everyone wrong. *Miow-pom-tinkity-pom* : then count three bars : then repeat : *Miow-pom-tinkity-pom*, until the cats have gone right round the ring, the last time you repeat it twice and prolong it to five beats : of course, you must not *dream* of doing this if the applause has not been sufficient ; the Senhor would be furious. He likes the performance to go straight on rapidly and not wait, as it were, for the

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huzzas. Well, I think that's all I have to tell you. The rest of the music, you'll find, consists of airs from the Operas. Of course, it is certainly unfortunate you've lost your part. Still, just remember what I've told you. Oh, and one more thing. When the Signorita Rosita enters start playing the Lebeneheit second movement *before* the cornet gets hold of it; if you don't, the cornet will certainly play that other instead—what is it? That other that's so like it, I never remember its name—the tune, unfortunately, comes to an end just as the Signorita is in the midst of the Croupade. If you like, of course, you can write out your score for yourself one of these days when you've discovered what it is. I can see you are a very accomplished musician. By the way, I suppose it wouldn't be possible for you to lend me a franc or so? Well, ah, what, could you really? Now indeed I must be off. It has been a pleasure to instruct you. Oh, and there is a uniform somewhere. H'm, well, perhaps, after a consumption—yes, perhaps better not. Probably nobody will notice you if you sit right in the back row. Of course, in that case, you will not be able to see any of the performers: however, all the same, you must not in any case play while the ponies are on their hind legs. I hope that is clearly understood.—Yes, yes, Herr Kranz, yes, here I am, yes, yes, he's got everything, he's perfectly instructed. Yes, without a hitch, I assure you, the Senhor will have no more cause for complaint."

Their voices died away, and Perroguet stood in the tent feeling as if his brain was swimming round.

How he got through that evening's performance he never knew. Not only were his eyes dazzled by the continuous swirling of lights as the circus-boys swung the flames to and fro at the end of the resinous torches, but his ears were deafened by the excruciating tones of the band whose every instrument seemed out of tune and who were held in some sort of composed order only by the thunder of the drums posted at each end, and by the braying of a couple of trumpets in the centre. It was impossible to think in that turmoil, or to pick out any notes that he

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might himself contribute harmoniously ; yet in the end he felt strangely exhilarated by the rush and beating of the noise, by the excited plaudits of the crowd, and by the sense of being one, however humble, of the company that performed sensational, beautiful and daring feats.

Hili crouched beside him all the time, and when the show was over they went to the food-tent again, thronged this time with all the artistes and circus-hands come in for their evening meal, with coats, wraps, dirty dressing-gowns thrown over their circus-costumes, with the paint still on their faces, fantastically brilliant, or washed off their faces, leaving them, in the hard light, fantastically pale. Together they looked with awed delight at this extraordinary world into which they had penetrated : and when the meal was over, finding that no one bothered about them, they curled up in some loose hay beside a wagon, hearing only the snuffling and snoring of heavy beasts and exhausted men, and feeling supremely exalted, tired and content.

Thus ended Perroguet's first day with the Cirque Lopez.

CHAPTER XIX

I

NOW, indeed, began the happiest years of his life. The Circus was a big and prosperous one. Besides the dozen or two of highly skilled artistes who changed from season to season, there were a large number of permanent staff, who loaded the carts, set up the arena and tents, pulled them down again, fed and tended the draught-horses, fetched wood and water for the cooking, and, of course, played in the band. Besides these, there was always a varied collection of animals belonging to or hired by the performers of different acts : dogs, seals, lions, camels, elephants. Their carts and cages, their attendants and their foraging, added a great deal of commotion and activity, and complicated the arrangements for travelling, which fell under Kranz's special direction. But whatever others there might be, horses were always there ; with plumes strapped to their foreheads they cantered round the narrow ring of the circus-track to the lilting tunes of the band, obeying the commands of whoever might be their master, and raising in Perroguet a constant rapture.

The circumstances of this new existence ideally fulfilled his needs. Bustle, movement, and a sense of gay importance were continuous : the same combination that had attracted him once before. Then, he had joined the parties of soldiers and in the end had suffered : now, in this reflection of life, removed from yet emphasising in some ways its highest attainments, he felt secure and content. No more, as in Lisbon, the being tied to one spot in order to be sure of a salary : no more, on the other hand, the anxious journeyings to and fro, uncertain

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of each day's bread. Here, while practising his beloved art, he could indulge his passion for change of scene, visit the varying world, admire towns, countries and customs, yet still retain an interesting and stable companionship composed of his fellow-workers: and above all, he could be sure, month after month, of the where-withal of life for himself and Hili. Food and shelter were theirs, henceforth, automatically. As long as the flag "Hotel" flew over the food-tent, any circus-hand, great or humble, could eat his fill.

Sometimes the food was coarse and often hastily cooked, but it was plentiful, and for those with good appetites what more is required? To be sure, occasionally he bought a little flour, wine and olives, and cooked one of his charming meals in the open as in the old days, these picnics being heightened in enjoyment for them both by a sense of truancy and extravagance.

At nights he slept beneath the wagons with a dozen other circus-men, while Hili occupied a corner of the caravan of that Signorita Rosita, who from the first glance had taken an extraordinary pleasure in her.

Besides his duties on the so-called piccolo (for which, as he had hoped, he had at once substituted a flute, without any remonstrance, the magic names of Lisbon Opera House and Mestre Yquentos investing him with a halo of impeccability) he had, like the rest of the band, a number of minor offices to perform. To these he gave himself gladly, lending a hand to the loading of carts, the hoisting or loosening of canvas, the handling of intractable draught-horses, especially in times of crisis, like stormy weather, or rains, or a sudden imperative need of haste to reach some town or village before a rival.

As for that sweet little Marie-Céleste, she soon became everybody's favourite. The world's Jockey from the Plata regarded her almost as a mascot, so much had the whole Company's prosperity increased since her arrival. At last she insisted on having the little girl, dressed in white muslin and stars, attendant in the Ring when she entered for her Act: it increased the applause, it acted

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somehow on the sensibilities of the audience. A full-grown woman would of course have been a rival, something to be feared and defeated : a pretty and merry child was different.

Finally, even this was not enough. Who knows what thoughts stirred in the heart of the beautiful and solitary Rosita, dependent for her livelihood on skill, courage, aloofness and abstinence from lovers ? Soon, not only did the child share her caravan, but, standing on one foot on a drum of white leather borne by a cream-coloured pony, she preceded the lady round the ring and through the streets of towns in the formal Parades. With a passion of force incredible in one whose public face was so cold, the Signorita poured out instructions, advice, short-cuts, learnt by years of practice : it was as if she felt all her beauty and her knowledge were piling up stagnant within her : with both hands she gave to this child the treasure she had taken such years of toil to acquire. And Hili was happy, she learnt what she could, she adored the clever and wonderful lady, everyone was kind to her, and Perroguet was always there.

Of course, at first they made mistakes. The whole world of circus slang and customs could only be learnt by degrees ; yet as the acts altered, and Perroguet was no longer the latest new-comer, he felt increasingly at home, and at peace : and when the bandmaster was finally dismissed, having been discovered by Kranz using his own conductor's score absent-mindedly to light a fire with in his tent—a thing which was in itself forbidden in the cause of public safety—and had trailed for the last time across the fair-ground followed by his eleven wailing children, and when the instruments had been properly tuned, and a new, energetic bandmaster engaged, under whose direction the band performance became a thing of energy and precision if not of beauty, then Perroguet felt happier than ever. Why did he not become bandmaster himself ? He could have had the post for the asking, on the strength of his musical knowledge. Yet he preferred to stay as he was, to be a willing

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unit in the harmony rather than have the harassing command of others.

He felt, too, as if some dream he could no longer remember had come enchantingly true. A slender child's figure, dressed in silver, raised above the crowds—this it was that fixed and yet eluded his memory. Watching that silver figure, knowing it as his own possession, feast-ing his eyes untrammelled, and seeing before him the golden years through which that shape danced always, his joy was full. Shafts of melody slid without effort into his mind, like shifting bars of sunlight.

Even that elusive strain, once sought yet not found, came now triumphant, resplendent, and flooded his whole being. In the back of his mind it dwelt, like the full-toned murmur of a river, whose many voices challenge each other so that only a deep, rushing urge of sound can be heard: yet little by little the essential music shook itself free, the melody at last emerged from the river glittering and pure as crystal. In a tremor of ecstasy he tried it on his flute. There it lay, drawn on the air, shining, fresh, newly born.

This tune expressed for him the deepest feelings of his heart. As the months passed, heaping themselves into years, it never grew stale, it was part of his own brain and breath, renewed each moment with the renewal of life. He played it so often that to those around him that tune and the sight of his spare brown figure seemed inseparable, mingled also with a kind of sparkling happiness that permeated them both.

Yes, this kind of life was the ideal existence. The Circus itself furnished a continual delight. A show of skill and courage, of beauty and strangeness, and more than a hint of danger. Yet, in the end, finished, rounded off, no fears left troubling. On the contrary, everything ending happily, precisely, and amidst applause. . . . However rashly the Troupe Adonis might risk their limbs, however grotesquely the Bossu Bizarre might manœuvre his cats, the last of their allotted moments in the Ring would find them in the centre, bowing, hand

on heart, for the approved second, while the Band hastily turned over their scores for the next number. . . . However ferociously the Senegalese might come galloping in, their white burden fainting between them, however ruthlessly they might tie her to the stake in the forest, however savagely the hungry lion might leap at that pale, doomed figure, filling the whole air with his heart-shaking roars, so that people trembled even on the farthest tiers, yet you knew that punctually, at the appointed moment, the Prince Sans-Peur would arrive upon the scene, discharging his musket into the savage brute : that, thereupon, dear old Sultan would beautifully collapse—even adding, sometimes, little touches of his own, like groaning, rolling his eyes, or heaving his sides ; and that afterwards, like a pleased child, he would trot back to his cage, licking the hand of his murderer, which invariably held some tit-bit.

And what was so charming and satisfactory, this ritual never varied. Whatever the weather, whatever the country, whatever the local language spoken, the lions and the horses and the ropes and the pulleys always responded to the same arguments.

Yes, now there was no anxiety except to be punctual for performances and rehearsals ; no discomfort greater than that of marching under the hot sun, uniformed to the moustachios, and sweating into your instruments ; combined with the necessity, of course, as the circus swung along and the Band blared, of shooing aside the crowd of ruffianly dogs who, in a seventh heaven of delight, always accompanied it, jaws open in a happy smile, eyes gleaming, tail grandly erect or waving in ecstasy. Yet even these had their uses : for some who refused to be cursed away stayed on as unpaid servants of the circus, in many serviceable rôles : this dog learned to guard and soothe the elephants, that dog lived with the horses, the other became the friend of the lions. This latter was a very unusual achievement and was greeted as a sign of good fortune by all the circus-people.

Then there was the unfailing delight of Signorita Rosita.

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Of all her many audiences no members were more enchanted than Perroguet and Marie-Céleste. It was to them both a daily wonder to watch her "Equitation Savante". Dressed in sequins, gold, embroidered cloths, her neat hands and firm waist seemed to hold in themselves a power that far outweighed her gaudy trappings. Even in stocking-tights, and flounced drawers ending above the knee in a gold fringe with tassels at the side, a Henry VIII hat and feathers, and curls over her eyes, she never looked ridiculous. She dressed as a Turk : as a Roman : as a Dervish : finally as a Hussar. For the latter she wore a short, braided coat, a flying shoulder-cape lined with fur, a cap surmounted with plumes, from which long plaits of hair descended each side of her face to her bodice, buttoned and frogged à la militaire : sabre in hand, with no whip, she exerted her will over her horses, helped only by a spur on one foot, hidden by the flowing skirt down which ran sternly a trouser-stripe of gold braid.

Thus variously attired, she would perform *Moyen de Surfaix Cavalier*, carrying a rod like a flag-staff, with branching arms connected with tiers of reins : or force upon her horses their acrobatic feats :—*la Pésade*, or rising on hind legs : *la Capriole*, with the hind legs outstretched ; *la Terre-à-Terre*, or crawling like a snail ; *le Mezair*, or gambolling like a lamb ; *la Croupade*, or jumping like a frog ; *la Ballattode*, a reinforced gallop ; *la Passage* ; and *la Courbette*, the prettiest of all.

And when eye and ear were surfeited, when the last notes had died away, when the turns were all over, and the audience departed, and darkness and silence spread over the field, so that you turned in comfortably in your blanket between the wheels of the caravan that held your beloved, then a heavenly peace descended, born of happy toil and the free air. And if you dreamt, pleasant images only crossed your mind—the long strings of the led-stock and the ring-stock swinging down the road : the streaming glow of the torch smoking in the night air at the entrance to the field to show the way : the elephants'

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grey hulks looming up against the shafts of light: or perhaps a trapeze artiste in silver tights under a loose scarlet cape crossing the fair-ground to his evening meal.

II

To the circus-people, the changes of towns were important; it was extraordinary and always unpredictable, with what divergence of acclaim the various cities would receive them. The visit to Paris was in everybody's mouth: it was greatly looked forward to: and here, indeed, they did well and stayed for two whole months.

Paris undoubtedly was busy and gay in that year. All the theatres were crammed, besides the Gardens of Tivoli and the promenade around the Palais Royale. Brilliant lights glowed in the cafés, restaurants and shops, which were kept open long after midnight. The French Corps de Ballet had drawn visitors from everywhere: nightly there were displays in the open air of acting and music and fireworks in the public Gardens. Loud voices and cries of laughter rang continually in the squares and along the streets at whose borders people feasted and made merry.

Something, however, was missing. There were no people of fashion in the capital, no equipages, no aristocratic noses, none of that bouquet of dignity and splendour exhaled by lords of titles and ladies of mansions. Revolution, terror, and uncertainty, had destroyed and driven them away. Instead, the folk of the provinces now presided over the entertainments. It was their faces alone that were borne in hired carriages through the streets. Women in pointed high-heeled shoes, with long pointed waists from which sashes streamed, and enormous and top-heavy bonnets, where several tiers of lace and ribbons jostled each other to the summit, strutted through the city uttering comments of exaggerated gentility and fastidiousness.

Perroquet was entertained by their conversations which he could not help overhearing. "And, my dear Madame, the things they refer to, or even mention openly! Every-

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one knows certain things exist, indeed, they are necessary, they are, perhaps even, you might say, a part of life, yet they are always, by decent people, kept in the dark, and rightly. Yet here at the Theatre, at the Opera, you would not believe how quite shamelessly they are alluded to ! Even in shops, nowadays"—a hand raised, a piercing whisper—"ladies ask for stockings!"—"Ah, dear Madame, I can thank Heaven I was not with you at such a scene. I should not have known which way to look ! The shock of it would have disorganised me entirely, I assure you." They stared about everywhere, wrinkling their over-refined faces, enjoying to the full the audacities of the Capital while waving their self-appointed flag of disapproval.

Perroquet, who thought the whole lot of them comic, ugly and artificial, yet moved among them as easily as among the peasants of Provence, along with the cousins of his profession—jugglers, pedlars, tumblers, and the more candid beggars of the town, whose natural good manners he could never sufficiently admire. "Place aux dames !" cried the beggars, making a lane between their ragged bodies to allow a bed-ridden old woman, member of the fraternity, to be carried to the door of a rich coach to implore alms. . . .

For some reason, these scenes vividly recalled Mr. Granby. His rumbling voice seemed to intone familiar reflections. . . . "Those middle classes, my fellow, who are most noticeably lacking in culture, imagination and good judgment, are also invariably those whose condemnation is the most rigid. For the very poor, you will observe, are usually too closely in touch with nature to be otherwise than simple and charming : while aristocrats are too experienced by travel, by privilege, literature, and the grand links of affairs and of human lives, to waste time on conventions whose futility history has always exposed. . . ."

The memory of this grave, kindly voice, thus inadvertently returning, brought into the midst of these gay scenes an inexplicable pain. He had never said good-

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bye to Mr. Granby, he had never finished that story. Where was he now, the good Chaplain ? "Fellow, you must never desert me !" he had so often said. Had he imagined that he had, after all, been deserted ? Had he ever known or guessed what fate had forced his servant from him ?—Pah ! these are old tales : Mr. Granby has forgotten by now that he ever had a servant on that dreadful journey : he is a stout country rector, happy in the midst of his family. Why should I think of him ?—This memory, brought by chance into his mind, remained to haunt him. He was not sorry when they left Paris.

This was the only shadow that fell on the scene : and by the time they were again in the open country and heading West once more, it, too, had fled.

Hili grew taller each day like a sapling drawn up into the clear air by the sun's warmth ; and Perroguet entered at last without restraint into the complete fullness of earth's enjoyment.

For he was a jolly man, Perroguet. No one could enjoy life more than he did, whether it was eating or drinking, or gossiping, or roaring out ditties in taverns or at fairs, or fluting his parts in the Circus band, or smoking a pipe on a balmy May morning. Even sleeping he seemed to enjoy more than anyone has ever done. As for ploughing along a hard rutty road with an icy gale in his face filled with pellets of steel, or struggling amid wind and rain to raise a mass of canvas that whipped him without mercy, he seemed to love these things with an enormous zest, if only for the pleasure of their ceasing.

Also, he was never poor. True, he often possessed nothing. Yet he who had nothing gave to the world that which it craved eagerly : from some invisible source he dispensed laughter, song, good spirits, sanity. Thus he was never cringing, grasping, or sorry for himself : never taking from earth like a sponge, absorbing and losing for earth her gifts, which is poverty. As for money, not infrequently he had some. Once every month, to be exact. He was careful with it—so much for clothing,

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himself and Hili, so much for tobacco, so much for drink and friendliness. He did not reckon this out in his head. It divided itself naturally, like the handfuls of flour or the drops of milk which went to his cooking.

He had to be busy, too, learning new pieces. All the latest and most popular airs were played at the Circus. For instance, when Sambo the ape entered, dressed as Napoleon, or perhaps Wellington, or Blucher, or even a composite General in a medley of uniform, they would play tunes from *Kampf und Sieg*, composed by Weber after Waterloo, thus providing a finely stirring and martial background : and when the camels came into the ring, or the elephants paraded in their jewelled back-cloths, they played the plaintive songs from the new operetta *Abu Hassan*, accompanied by intermittent bangings of drums and tinkling of cymbals : this was considered to give a very exotic and Oriental effect.

To this camel-scene Perroguet was enabled to add a contribution of his own. For as soon as the camels entered, dressed as Lords of the Desert, their swaying and humped forms richly clad, their supercilious faces crowned with white Arabian head-dresses, a number of girls in Eastern draperies, their arms folded before them, ran into the ring, and after a swift, impassioned dance knelt down before the beasts. Spreading their arms, from which dropped Egyptian wings, consisting of green feathers formally placed, row on row they appeared to resemble birds, an image enforced as soon as they turned their heads to one side, showing a plumaged head-dress terminating above the forehead in a beak : in this supplicating attitude, their arms outstretched, they remained motionless, while Perroguet expressed for them, in the moving tones of his flute, their entreaty to the camels to spare the lives of their lovers. . . .

III

Into this fantastic world the outer affairs of life hardly penetrated.

And this was fortunate, for as they neared Spain, sad

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evidences of the past tornado were not lacking. Sometimes a piece of waste ground, where they had hoped to camp, was found still littered with the skeletons of the fallen, clad in faded red coats, or in faded blue and grey coats, all friends alike now, quiet as the broken weapons, broken harness, rusted helmets, and spent ammunition, among which they were lying. Once they passed a Portuguese soldier and an English soldier's wife, still hanging side by side from a mulberry tree—grim witness of Wellington's punishment for plunder. To most of the circus-folk these emblems seemed unimportant. The nightly act, the continuous road, their own physical fitness and skill was their universe. Even the news of the death of Napoleon hardly stirred it.

"Eh, eh, to die of cancer in the stomach!" said the old groom Gaugin, spitting as he gave the last polish to the harness before fitting it on the wide, patient back. "Well, that's a fine end of pomps and victories."

Outside the pad-room a young girl clad in silk tights and spangles leant laughing against the tent-pole. "It's a pity he could not have lived at least to see my Act! It improves every day, too. Watch me, now." The bugle sounded, the rosin-backs were brought to the entrance. She leapt into the ring lightly, flinging up her curls: Signorita Rosita followed: in a few moments a rattle of huzzas shook the canvas walls.

"Eh, eh," said the old Gaugin, later, continuing his thoughts, a pint of wine in his hand, "I remember well, at the *Cirque* in Paris, the Emperor Napoleon often came to the performances. Yes, he was a noted patron, sometimes he roamed behind the scenes in the evenings or even mounted the horses. Naturally one could deny him nothing. I can see him now, the little General, in the blue and gold of fête, careering about at the back, on the circus-beasts, proud of his skill, for he, too, could make them do some tricks. And once, my friends, you'll never believe this, but it's true, I assure you,—once when he was riding an old circus-mare the bugle went, and she, of course, instantly entered the ring, and cantered around,

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Napoleon upon her back. Eh, eh, what a hurricane of applause ! And he smiled, Napoleon, and kissed his hand like a true trouper, enjoying the tribute, paid, as he thought, to his equestrianism and not to his being First Consul. And so it was, for all I know. But he threw us a handful of gold as he left the ring and told us the old mare must be specially cared for. Eh, well, and now cancer in the stomach.'

A man shifted on an upturned bucket. It was Togonif, the dwarf, he who drove the miniature ponies. "*He* care for animals !" he scoffed. He turned to Perroguet. "Come, are you not a Frenchman ? Perhaps you can tell me this. Now he is dead one can talk freely. With the exception of the Buonaparte family, is anyone in the world better off for Napoleon ? This at least is true. A lot of men, women, and animals through him suffered pain, starvation and death."

This was the sole acknowledgment of the Circus to the passing of the man of destiny : save that, once they were out of France, Senhor Lopez added for a few weeks to his programme a Carnival act of fireworks, in which an effigy of Buonaparte was savaged very humorously by an effigy of the British lion.

At last the rows of poplars along the roadsides gave way to cactus-hedges, the auberges to posadas. The peasants' gardens were surrounded with walls of aloe, whose central spikes sprayed clusters of white bloom. The towns of Spain blinked their yellow windows in the sun, gardens whose trees were covered with blossoms overhung the streets. Soon lemon, orange and fig trees were in fruit. The food-tent was piled daily with melons, figs, grapes. Going through a town you would see a woman open a window and pull in a bunch of grapes from the vine on the wall. Her laughing teeth flashed for a moment ere the window closed.

They came to the Basque provinces, those which had still their ancient rights, and over which no Spanish king could rule. Here you had to go warily as to renting ground, obtaining permission for performance, and a hun-

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dred other formalities. Near Pampeluna and Vittoria Perroguet heard again the magical Basque tongue, said to have been spoken by Tubal, Noah's great-nephew, when he came to Spain one hundred and forty-three years after the Flood. What enchantment this language still evoked! And what memories of Father Dolin, with sorrows, tears, fears, despairs, at last ended and charmed away.

In these halcyon days, the only displeasing note was provided by his old enemies the bullock-drivers. In some extraordinary manner they and their carts always managed to hold up and disorganise the circus traffic: some important wagon or caravan would be found unable to proceed because two bullock-carts, side by side, blocked the road, either stationary or progressing at a snail's pace: their drivers, in either case, so engrossed in a heated discussion of local interest or indulging so whole-heartedly in some native song of doubtful virtue that they appeared unable to apprehend the infuriated words and gestures of those behind them on the road. This was bad enough, but sometimes on a narrow route one cart alone was able to block it: then there was nothing to be done but to trudge mile after mile in its rear, swallowing its dust, deafened by its noise, ignoring the joyous grimaces of the driver, and wishing the saints would blow it sky-high. It was impossible to play the band behind that swaying and squeaking abomination: and Perroguet, his mind filled with the bright circus scenes, looked with loathing at the lean yellow faces, the long black hair, the dirty naked bodies in their sole clothing—a blanket with a hole cut for the head. The extraordinarily hideous shrieking of the solid wooden wheels of the carts set his teeth on edge, made his head ache. "Why on earth do you do it?" he demanded angrily one evening of the triumphant driver of four oxen who had impeded them all day. "Are you people all deaf? Certainly any visitor to your country prays to become so."

"Well, friend, now you've asked a difficult question.

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Some say one thing, some say another. My father used to say it was so that people carting contraband goods could be easily pursued. For myself I think it is a blessing provided by the Virgin, so that at sharp curves, or up and down hill, where one cannot see, one can at least hear the other." He raked his hand through his black locks, goaded the bullocks with his staff tipped with iron, and looked patronisingly at the two on foot. " And what do you think, eh ? " he tossed at the young girl.

Hili felt he had been teasing Perro. She knew how his head ached. She looked at the hideous yellow face with a calm, fierce conviction. " I think," she said, " it is all your own vanity. You *like* to make a noise in the world. It is like the big drum, ever so noisy because it is only full of air."

Her little manner of defiance and protection, like an enraged kitten, enchanted Perroguet. He threw up his head and he laughed, anger forgotten. He laughed in a great billow that swept a sheepish grin even to the face of the driver, and a pleasure to those following on the road, who smiled at that hearty sound, without knowing why ; and a happiness even to Hili, who smiled and blushed, and nuzzled her curls against his arm.

And Perroguet was satisfied, too. There had to be some disharmony in his *Eden* or he would not have been able to make himself believe he was really alive.

IV

Within a month or two they were in Lisbon. Senhor Lopez, unable to resist a return to his beloved city, had managed to squeeze in a flying visit between the main Fairs over the border.

It was pleasant to be in that city again, in spite of its dreadful smells : it was pleasant to stroll triumphantly past the Opera House where the golden wreath had not descended upon Wellington ; or even to peep in, and view with scorn the dark chasm, almost underground, where nightly one had played the flute. Now that Hili was older and able to understand and enjoy, it was .

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pleasant to explore the streets scattered over those seven hills, watching the busy doings in the shops, or the ladies sitting on balconies under silk awnings conversing with passers-by in the language of the fan ; or noticing how the women of the people, common and dirty though they were, still loaded themselves with jewels—amethysts, and topazes, which were so cheap just then. Perhaps you ought to buy some decoration for Hili ? But Hili always seemed perfect without it. Still, it was good to have money to spend—to be able to buy a whole barrelful of water, nine gallons a vintem, from a Galician labourer with the back of an ox ; to respond to the cry *Que quer segaro?* and let the man ignite it, too, with his length of lighted tow, for a tiny extra sum : to buy ice-creams for Hili out of a churn with a handsome metal cup attached ; and when she had had too many of them to restore her with steaming sardinias or with hot chestnuts, roasted in the street in red-hot earthen furnaces fanned by old women with fans of wickerwork.

Then, on Sundays, between the Circus performances, you could watch the people in the Squares dancing the fandango, twining and turning without unlinking hands. Above the music of their dancing boomed the deep tones of the church bells, mingling with a harmonic dominance : these two sounds, thus thrown out, one from the earth and one from the air, brought to him a memory of something heard long since, the twin voices of a bird and a stream, fulfilling the whole area of desire, as if the cycle were completed that linked the essential harmony between things of the body and of the spirit.

The calm evening light gave to the scene a cool and exquisite perfection. “ I perceive after all,” said Perroguet, carried away by his own feelings, and turning to the man beside him, “ you people have learnt how to live.”

“ Verdadeiramente, we do things well here, the world knows it.”

A bell clanged from the church, indicating the performance of mysteries within. The man uncovered, crossed himself, and struck his breast.

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"I, too," said Perroguet, "feel within me at these times some divine influence, arising as it were from the very air we breathe, as if—"

"Agua vai!" shouted a voice above. Perroguet dodged abruptly, pulling Hili aside. A cargo of evil-smelling garbage sloshed between them.

"That was a near thing!" grinned the man, taking off his hat, wiping his brow and gazing ruefully at his spattered stockings; and giving at once a friendliness to the stranger who had shared a common though momentary danger. "Still, there's not much harm done. Even a new pair would not cost much. Nothing to what *can* happen. Once my brother's wife threw a panful of decayed fish upon the canopy of a priest conveying extreme unction: my word, that was an expensive business, it took all the savings of the whole family before we could get her absolved. She was terrified, too. She would rather have died than do it."

"Indeed, yes," said Perroguet. His whole mood was shattered. The calm and soft vision was lost altogether. He turned his mind with annoyance to the troubles of the brother's wife. "Naturally she would have to pay to expiate her sin," he said sharply. "But would it not be wiser (pardon me, a stranger, making the suggestion) to remove the cause of such a daily danger to the soul?"

"What, give up our rights? What an idea! Don't you know this custom has survived since Lisbon was built? Are you an anarchist?"

"No, no, Heaven forbid."

But the man smiled no longer, he looked threatening. Perroguet edged away rapidly amongst the crowd, and soon they retraced their steps to the Circus where the performance was shortly to begin. Hili was silent all the way.

"Why did the woman's family have to *pay*, Perro, for her forgiveness?" she asked, when, the show over, they sat at peace on the grass, their backs against a wagon-wheel, their minds soothed by the dark sky in which stars were gathering. "When I was at the Con-

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vent I used to be terribly worried about things, now I haven't thought of them for a long time. Yet to-day when the man said that, I looked up, and just opposite was the place where you say they held the Inquisition. I know, as you've told me, that now people no longer believe it is holy to torture each other, so do they take their money in the place of the torture? But if it's cruel and wicked to hurt people's bodies, isn't it cruel to take their money, too? And even then the money does not get to heaven. What is it for, Perro? Why do they do it?"

"I don't know, my darling," said Perroguet humbly. "I know so little. Even what I thought I knew your words incessantly plunge in doubt. We live here for such a short time it is impossible to find out everything. But when we are dead we are to live for ever. Therefore we strive to be on good terms with God. Some do it by worshipping their ancestors, some by telling their beads, some by giving gold embroideries for altar-cloths, some by condemning others, some by keeping silence, like the Indian, Juggernaut, some by cutting off bits of themselves—either body or mind. As to all these, I don't know. But I know this. A clean hand and a kind heart are acceptable to God. A kind heart, darling, and a clean hand."

A sense of the importance of that moment suddenly came deeply upon him: mingled with the voice of the good Mr. Granby, the face of the good Father Dolin. He felt humble, yet sure of his strength. "That's all your poor Perro can tell you. Remember it, darling, always." He turned over to look at Hili.

She was sitting very erect, her hands on her lap, her face lifted to the stars. In silence he watched the silver light flood that pure outline, whose pattern traced the deep melody in his heart; and all at once he discovered she was no longer a child.

A wave of inexpressible feeling, sad yet exultant, flowed through him. He put out his hand and drew her arm through his. He began speaking slowly. "Some day a

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stranger will come here, Hili. A strong young man, glowing, younger than I. Some day, darling, you will be married."

"Oh, no, Perro, I shall never marry. I can't imagine ever wanting anyone but you."

She flung up both her arms and embraced him with a warm, swift affection. Perroguet clasped her close, and with her head on his breast he stayed, looking above her curls into the dark infinite sky, tinged already with the light from the rising moon.

After a little, he stirred. "It is late. You will be cold. Come, you must go to bed. Roses do not grow by moonlight. A good night, my Hili. See, here is your caravan. Run up the steps and be asleep soon."

"Good night, Perro. How I wish I could stay with you. I don't think the Signorita likes me as much as before."

C H A P T E R X X

A WEEK later they moved across the border once more into Spain, travelling rapidly to make a tour of the big fairs during the height of the season.

These forced marches were not so pleasant, they entailed a great deal of work, and some discomfort: but everyone realised their ultimate advantage and laboured with a will. It was gratifying, too, to hear from their advance agent, as they arrived at any town, that already all the available seats had been booked for the two or three days of their stay. By superhuman efforts they presented themselves in time for each festa in each town on the route Senhor Lopez had arranged for them: at last, however, there came black looks and complaining murmurs from the men, demands, half choked, for double pay, and growls from the big cats incessantly jolted along the roads. Unable, temperamentally, to do anything but foment trouble when trouble arose, Senhor Lopez was guided by Heaven to call a halt.

In a rich wooded valley that lay between a desolate tract of country and the nearest big town, whose fête was not for another six days, he pitched his encampment. Here there was a welcome rest for tired men and horses. For nearly a week they were able to relax, lying about in the sun, eating and sleeping: the acrobats practising, as ever, each day, the movements that kept them supple, the women attending to the inevitable repairs and embellishments of costumes.

But on the fifth day a rugged and booted stranger arrived on horseback at the camp, shouting to see the manager. After a short consultation with him, Senhor Lopez emerged, all smiles, summoned the male members

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of the company, and announced that he had an invitation to communicate. It appeared that the Conde who owned the land—a very rich, magnificent and influential nobleman—was arranging a boar-hunt for the morrow, and being always glad of extra beaters, his man had come to enquire if any able-bodied folk from the circuscamp would care to act as such, receiving, of course, the usual fee.

Half a dozen men volunteered instantly, Perroguet among them.

Next morning they rose early, the guide who had already arrived from the Castle showing them the way to the woods. It was a fine, beautiful day, the dew-drops still sparkled on the foliage as they set off. Hili came with them to the edge of the camp. "Good-bye, Perro. Do take care. Don't let the boar hurt you, will you?"

Perroguet laughed with joy at her gentle, absurd concern: what could hurt him in a fine, beautiful world like this? "It is for the boar you should grieve, silly one. For Madame Boar, too, and the little ones. Yet perhaps we shall take nothing. But fear not, in any case I shall come back safe and sound, tonight, or at latest tomorrow morning."

All day the sun shone; even in the deepest parts of the woods the birds were singing. Perroguet and his friends saw little of the hunt, their duty was to advance in a gigantic semicircle beating the bushes with their sticks, shouting, and generally creating as much disturbance as possible. Here and there a few of the keepers appeared, on foot, with spears ten feet long, which they manœuvred with great dexterity among the tree-trunks. Occasionally, in the distance, a shaft of light between the trees illumined for a second the glossy flanks of a horse, a gentleman's gay doublet, the bright floating skirt of a lady, or the tossing of a hat brilliant with plumes. Whether there were any boars or not, for a long time Perroguet was unable to determine. At midday they all rested, a magnificent almorzar being served

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in a clearing to the ladies and gentlemen by the Conde's servants.

"What sort of a man is he, the owner?" asked Perroguet, much impressed, to his neighbour on the right.

"The Conde?" He looked at Perroguet curiously, then all round as if to make sure he would not be overheard, then he grinned and leaned towards him. Just as he was about to speak, he appeared to change his mind. His look, which had been that of one about to impart some lascivious secret, altered to a scowl of hatred and fear. Finally he raised his finger to his head in the way that was used to indicate some looseness of intellect: immediately, as if, even without speaking, he had already said too much, he jumped to his feet and began making ready for the afternoon's labours.

All through the afternoon the men progressed, steadily beating the wood. Now a sense of excitement began to diffuse itself: the keepers were seen running hither and thither, a groom on a horse came by at a sharp canter: orders were shouted between them, which though couched in some hunting jargon, bore a startling urgency. Suddenly, out of the midst of the tall undergrowth before them, there burst a sounder of pig. Away they went, crashing and snorting and squealing: away went the gentlemen after them, flashing their spears. Away they all went into the distance; and Perroguet and his companions sat down thankfully and mopped their brows.

But either the hunters, or the horses, or the fair riders, or the nature of the ground, proved adverse to a continued pursuit; for, before long, a volley of musket-shots ringing out from the distant flank of the hill towards which the boars had turned, told how the hunt servants had, as usual, saved the situation by bringing down the game with a ball.

This noise was greeted with delight by all the beaters. The shots were counted, the number of dead computed: for each head over two the beaters would get so much extra. A great air of jollity and triumph swept over them as they sat there, swelling the importance of their

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contribution to this successful issue. At once the older ones began recounting those tales of monstrous beasts slain formerly, when boars *were* boars. . . .

A keeper came along and selected a few men to help haul the carts bearing the day's spoils: the rest were given a tally to present at a hut at the wood's edge where they would receive their pay.

The ladies and gentlemen, with noise and laughter, had already departed along the green forest glades.

Perroquet, by this time, had quite lost track of his companions from the Circus. But that did not trouble him. With his pocket jingling, his mind full of sunny scenes, he marched cheerfully along the path that led to the high-road. How happy, tired, hungry, thirsty, exhilarated you felt! How full life was! One adventure, one new experience after another, each more delightful than the last, each coming unexpectedly, like a gift from heaven, flinging itself into the bursting measure.

The birds were trilling their evening song and the light fading from the sky as he emerged on the long grey road that led from the woods to the village. It was a good march yet to the circus-camp, and he had had no food all day; a hasty meal, a drink, at the nearest inn was what he craved; besides, there was no hurry, the night was before him.

Turning a bend in the road he perceived, all at once, some yards ahead, a lady, alone, on horseback. A member of the hunting-party doubtless. . . . What was she waiting for? Lost her way, perhaps: yet that was queer—hadn't they all gone off together? Well, perhaps he could help. She seemed to be in difficulty of some sort, for still she stayed at the edge of the road, while her horse, as if utterly weary of waiting, tossed his black head, pawed the ground with his forelegs and wheeled continually, as if only kept from his stable by bit and curb.

Perroquet advanced cheerfully, bowing as he approached. "Can I, Señora, perhaps be of some service?" his bow said.

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The lady leaned forward from her high Spanish saddle, one foot pressed the broad wooden stirrup : the plumes of her hat shadowed her dark eyes.

"Did you happen to pass a Cavalier upon the road ?" she enquired anxiously. "A mile or two back, perhaps?"

Perroguet stroked his beard. No, he had passed no one on the road : all the gentlemen of the hunting-party had gone on before.

"This was not a gentleman of the hunting-party——" She broke off, biting her lip. Perroguet looked up. The sound of her voice suddenly sprang through him, quickening a memory. . . . A mail-coach, swaying through a dark wood, a pale hand holding a black fan, above it the sparkling eyes of that merry Condesa. . . .

Extremely startled, he stared, he looked aghast at the lady, lost in wonder and pity. The voice, the shape of the face were the same, that was all. The cheeks were sharp and pale, consumed by some inward, unresting worm ; a world of knowledge and tortured desire looked forth from those dark eyes ; the scarlet mouth drooped, ravaged with passion and a kind of doomed despair.

The shock of this pale, beautiful and tragic face deprived him for a moment of speech.

"Condesa," he said at last, "how gladly I would have told you what you wish to hear! Perhaps the gentleman——"

At that moment a sharp sound of trotting broke upon them. The lady leant back at once, very upright, a flush mounted swiftly to her face that turned with an eager passion to the sound, her hands that held the reins were trembling.

A hunt servant, very hot and very late, came into view. His mount had fallen somewhere, as the dusty flanks showed ; this, no doubt, had delayed him. For all his haste, he slowed down on seeing the Condesa and saluted : he eyed Perroguet with curiosity and surprise, seeing him in that company : the next moment, when the road

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hid him, his horse's hoofs could be heard trotting rapidly away.

For a second, after his passing, there was silence. The lady seemed to have forgotten the existence of Perroguet. She did not seem to know she had ever seen him before. He glanced at her, abashed. A look of an unutterable resolve had swept into her face, whiter now than marble: her horse, tormented by the sound of the other's home-going, reared impatiently: suddenly, with a stab of the spur, she turned him, and plunging from the road, galloped across the country towards a far and dark cluster of trees.

Perroguet stopped when he reached the nearest inn. Here, at least, he could get something to drink: his throat felt scorching, and the money in his pocket shouted to be turned into liquid to cool it. A meal, too, would be very welcome; he wouldn't be particular, anything would do to see him on his way.

Alas, the posada was absolutely crowded. A single glance showed that it would be long indeed ere he was served. Yet there was not another inn for many a mile, and that, too, might take him out of his course. No, there was nothing to do but sit down and wait, and take what interest you could out of the scene.

The whole of the interior was occupied by villagers, several beaters from the hunt come in to spend their earnings, one or two country travellers, besides muleteers, mules, horses, hens, two or three pigs, three cows, a couple of goats, and innumerable dogs of many varieties. The heat was overpowering.

At last he was able to give an order for wine to the tired serving-girl. "And do hurry, lass," he implored, "heaven alone knows my thirst."

After an interminable time she approached him with a mug. Just as she was about to fill it, a shouting came from above their heads. As if from some Olympus a trap-door suddenly opened in the ceiling and clouds of a bitter smoke billowed into the room. Nobody

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except Perroguet looked up or seemed surprised by this invasion. At the opening a face appeared, scarlet with rage and impatience.

With a resigned air the serving-maid fetched in the ladder from the courtyard, raised it against the trap and mounted. Her voice came down through the smoke, gentle and melancholy. "Yes, sirs, eggs and pork. spirit, yes : accadent, yes : oil, tobacco, and chocolate."

The maid descended, the scarlet face withdrew, a calf's head appeared instead at the opening. It was the child of one of the cows : the mother, beneath, raised her broad muzzle and mooed enormously. The calf whinnied from above. No one heeded the pangs of either. The trap-door was shut again - almost at once a rather sad little trickle began to come through the boards. . . .

Perroguet got his wine at last, and deeply he drank.

"Were you not at the boar-hunt to-day, brother ?" enquired a neighbour. They talked of hunts of the past, when the Conde himself had taken part : grim, fierce affairs they were then, two score boars would be killed, perhaps in one day : now that the Conde kept to the house the hunts had turned into an open-air festin, continued only for his lady the Condesa, who loved amusement before anything. Perroguet stared. The deeply sad face of the Condesa rose in his mind. He felt bewildered. The room was hot and the wine began to sing in his head.

The gap in the ceiling opened again. This time the Olympians were demanding another table and a chair. The trap-door was too small for their passage. Again the ladder was set up : with an expression of contempt strange on her child's face the maid began to pull away the loose planks of the ceiling.

"Say, who are these people who need so much ?" asked Perroguet vaguely.

"Ah, my friend, just there is a little mystery. They are the hirelings of some gentleman who told them to meet him here one day last week, with horses and a carriage. They have been here ever since, expecting him daily. At first it was quite secret, no one knew of it :

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now, sitting here drinking all day as they are, their tongues have loosened. They entertain themselves royally, saying the gentleman will pay. I think, however, the host is losing patience. I fear if he doesn't turn up tonight they will all be turned out tomorrow."

Something in this speech, between the heat and the smoke and the wine-fumes, seemed to link with something already known. What was it? Never mind. "A vuestra salud!" said Perroguet; he raised his mug and drank.

It was now very late. The night outside was pitch-black. Too late, too black by far, to try and find one's way to the Circus. The host came bustling towards them. Could Perroguet have a corner for the night?

"On the contrary," said the host, "I must ask you to finish your wine and leave. All of you, if you please, who are not staying here." His angry tone expressed a patience that was, indeed, on the edge of snapping.

Well, that was nothing to Perroguet. It was a warm night, and he had his cloak, and he was full of wine.

He left the inn, following the dim glimmer of the road, feeling happy and content, and looking about for a good place to spend the night. Over there, on the horizon, a darker shadow indicated the presence of trees. Something about this seemed attractive. He walked along the road till he came to it, and turning off, he found himself in an orchard, whose ripe fruits filled the darkness with a warm, delicious scent. Enchanted with their magic, he pressed on to the very end; here the trees gave way to the pines and chestnuts of the woods. Yes, here was the ideal place.

The pine-needles were soft and dry. He lay down, wrapped in his cloak, sorry only that the black sky showed no stars.

All the tiredness of his long day's tramping at once came upon him: a soft wave of sleep rolled under him gently, sank away, and rolled again. . . . Just before he slept he thought a horse whinnied somewhere in the darkness. What a surprising meeting that had been,

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after so many years, with that Condesa. What chances one lives by ! I wish her happiness, at least, he thought : poor creature, she seems to need that wish.

Wissh, wissh, said the boughs whispering over his head. Sleep engulfed him.

A rude hand pulling his arm woke him.

The sun was already high. He must have slept late. This was his first thought.

The second was the realisation of a dozen angry faces around him, dressed in the green of the Conde's guards. One had pulled him to his feet, another gave him a buffet on the side, another swiftly pinioned his arms, while a fourth tied his hands behind his back with a rope. Dazed, bewildered, incredulous, he could only stare and stumble.

" My good friends," he began, " what on earth—what has happened ? Let me go at once. There's some mistake. What do you——"

" Peace !" said a man, smiting him on the mouth.

He looked at them again in utter confusion. They were haggard, dirty, and streaming with sweat. Their eyes were black and staring as if they had seen a ghost. What ghastly sight could have brought that look to men's faces ?

" What do you take me for ? I have done no wrong. Since when is it a crime to sleep under a tree ? "

" March !" said the guard. He prodded Perroguet with his musket. Two men took him by the arms and forced him through the wood.

" What have I done ? At least," cried Perroguet, " what do you imagine I have done ? Surely you can tell me that ? "

There was no answer.

He repeated it. " Come, my friends, be a little civil. Can a man not know why he is trussed and carted along like this ? "

A youngster beside him turned to him savagely.

" You ask us that !" he cried. " We, who have been out all night searching for the Condesa who did not

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return with the hunting-party to the Castle, we who found her at dawn—Mother of God!—lying dead in her blood in the little hut in the wood, killed by her own pistol too,—Heaven grant I never again may see such a sight, so piteous, so terrible! . . . We—we hardly dared tell the Conde. Since dawn we've been searching the woods by his orders. And then we find you, asleep, near her tethered horse. And you ask us why you are taken!"

"But—but—" said Perroguet. He could not speak. He was appallingly shocked. The news, the sudden, frightful picture it evoked, seemed to whirl away his senses.

"I know nothing of this," he stammered at last. "I am a stranger here. I spent last night at the tavern. I don't know the Condesa. The news you tell me shocks me utterly. I wouldn't kill a fly. I wouldn't kill an ant, even. I have wished only well to the Condesa, always, from the first time I met her."

"You'd better tell that to the Conde," said the old guard grimly. "Your remarks sound to me a little confused.—Hi, hi, Pedro, hold on, quick, don't let him escape there!—Yes, whew! that was a near go! I see we can't take any chances!—Well, now that we've reached the road, my men, two of you had better go in front, and four behind, and the rest alongside, we can march him like that up to the Castle. A slippery customer, I can see clearly.—Yes, to the Conde you can tell your tale, and to the Alcalde too. They will listen to you. Perhaps."

After this for half an hour nobody spoke. Perroguet was too numbed with bewilderment to collect his reason: what little he had left of it told him that in any case it was useless to remonstrate with these men; they were servants, carrying out orders. Besides, he was entirely occupied in keeping up with their heavy, long strides, without stumbling. One ridiculous thought, in the midst of his horror and misery, kept recurring: "I never realised before how much one depends on one's arms for balance in walking."

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As they neared the Castle gates the youngest of the men spoke again.

"Yes, the Alcalde is the chap for you. He'll soon worm the truth out of you, I can tell you. Why, he has got a collection of bandits' ears, better than any other in Spain! all sizes, all colours, alike only in this, that he was able to make each of their owners confess his crimes before he died."

"Will you believe, once and for all, that I have not committed any crime?" said Perroguet sharply.

"Silence!" said the guard, striking him again. The Conde and the Alcalde, too, might appear now at any moment, and he wished to present his prisoner in an orderly manner.

At the very entrance to the Castle, on the stone terrace, they met, face to face.

The Conde had not changed. The same small poisoned body, the same sharp angry eyes. Unlike the Condesa he recognised Perroguet at once.

"*You!*" he said, hissing. "*Usted!*"

He stared in a demoniac satisfaction, a red flush surged under his skin, the blue vein in his temple swelled and throbbed, the light of insanity flashed again in his eyes.

"I told you," he said, "long ago, I would throw you to the dogs!"

What happened after that was a nightmare to Perroguet, a blurred incredible time of terror and helplessness.

As in a dream he heard the Alcalde formally taking his stand on the side of Humanity, though clearly fearful of the Conde: as in a dream he heard his own voice declaiming passionately who he was, where he came from, in what manner he had spent the night: he heard the Count's groom relate to them all how he had come on them both, the stranger and the lady, conversing alone, late in the evening, upon the high-road, a fact suspicious in itself: he heard the frightened innkeeper, hastily sum-

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moned, tell at what hour he had left the posada and had been seen going off in the direction of the wood.

He heard this, that, and the other person speak.

"This is not evidence of guilt," the Alcalde kept saying. "This meeting, and the previous one, noble Conde, of which you tell me, may perhaps, after all, be due to chance; or, shall we say, coincidence."

"Coincidences like this," cried the Conde fiercely, "occur only in romances: never in real life!"

For a minute the Alcalde, a lettered man, seemed inclined to agree with him. "Everyone knows," he murmured obligingly, "coincidence is the hard-worked hobby-horse of the world of fiction. Should it," he continued temperately, "be considered, for that reason, an *impossibility* in the world of fact?" He gazed thoughtfully at his well-cut finger-nails.

"Besides," cried the Conde, foaming, "this man is, in any case, a criminal of the worst type. He tried to kill us all in the coach! I saw him with my own eyes threatening the Condesa with a pistol! He robbed us too. Murder and robbery are his trade, I knew it at the time. Now he has tracked us here. Coming with the Circus (if that is true) was doubtless a very good way. I said I would throw him to the dogs at the Castle gates, and I will!"

"You cannot do that, noble sir," said the Alcalde suavely. "You have no right, and the man may be innocent. There is no evidence."

"Then I'll keep him till there *is* evidence!"

The Alcalde shrugged his shoulders: and then bowed. As to that, he seemed to say, I have no jurisdiction. "His life, at least, serene Conde," he murmured diplomatically, "cannot be legally ended without a more direct proof of his crime."

With many formalities he departed.

The Conde alone remained on the terrace. Dazed between the grief and rage of his loss and the insane triumph of his capture, he stood before Perroguet hissing like a snake.

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"I implore you, at least," said Perroquet desperately, "let me communicate with my master, Senhor Lopez, of the Circus. They are encamped not more than a few leagues away. If you will only, out of your humanity, make a few investigations, you will see every word I have said to you is true. After all, it was at your own servant's invitation I came into your lands to beat the boar for your hunting. I implore, I beg, not for myself only—"

"*My hunting!*" cried the Conde furiously. That seemed to have stung him. "Take him below!" he screamed to the guard. "You have your orders!"

Perroquet was marched off to a cell in the depths of the Castle.

Here he was hung up with ropes by the wrists—a favourite punishment of the Conde. For many hours the entire weight of his body hung from his bleeding wrists and dislocated shoulders. His whole body began to burn like a furnace: the scorching torrents of pain that flowed through his arms suffused at last every fibre of his being with an intolerable and fiery agony. His tongue swelled in his mouth: his head seemed bursting under the stinging blows of his pulse: every nerve shuddered, and swelled, and sank, in that ghastly and unbearable suspension.

All through that time, that seemed like a hundred lives, he begged piteously for water, not knowing himself to be alone in the cell.

At last, when the guards returned, they cut him down, believing him dead. He fell flat on the cell-floor, an inert mass, speechless, white with pain.

Within that dungeon he stayed; hardly knowing night from day, yet aware that days passed.

His first reasoned thoughts were of Hili.

He was thankful to remember that he had left money with her; he was glad to reflect that the Rosita was kind to her, had taken to her so strongly from the first, would be sure to look after her, for a little time, at least. There

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was great comfort in that knowledge, and the prisoner hugged it close.

The time flowed by, he could not tell how slowly or quickly. In that small chamber it was always cold, and light came rarely. He counted the days only by the times the guards brought him his daily meal : and soon these times, too, flowed together, mingling confusedly, indiscernible in the grey and empty silence of his cell.

He had no more pain to suffer : after the first day the guards left him alone. He had nothing to see, or feel, or touch, or listen to. Out of the whole world he had nothing left to him now but his thoughts and his memories. In the utter quiet of his cell, under the timeless passing of the days, his mind turned them over and over, these stray gifts from the past ; they seemed like scraps of fabric, sorted, and turned over and over, in an old woman's lap. . . .

The fragments were all different : different shapes, sizes, colours : even of one material there was no large piece anywhere. Unrelated adventures, inconsequent meetings : thoughts, conversations, twisted to a pitch for a moment, then lost, never resumed. Journeys from one town to another, from one land to another, here for no reason one day, another day for no reason there. Fairs, fêtes, landscapes, incidents, people's faces : brilliantly illumined in every detail, seeming of importance but leading nowhere. Scraps of fabric, gaudy or plain, each perfect, beautifully woven, yet torn without design from the mass. He saw his life as a crazy, painted curtain, through whose rents showed, here and there, the flashing backgrounds of history. . . . Well, he'd had happiness, music, laughter, and starshine. These alone seemed to be the links that ran through the chain : their brightness lighted it all the way : his mind opened in gratitude for the many things he had known, and loved and enjoyed.

And there, at the end of the chain, was its anchor. The whole warmth of his heart crystallised at last into

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that tiny figure, radiant and rosy, slipping her hand into his own.

"I can be with her still, with my darling Oh, saints, have I offended you? Oh, Mary, Queen of Heaven, forgive me that time I laughed at you in the full-bottomed wig. Forget how I thought the poor should have had the jewels on your image. Remember only your kindness and mercy. . . . Be with her, angels and saints. She is young. She will be lonely and frightened,—deserted, like that, without warning. . . . Yes, there is a fate upon me. First Mr. Granby, then my little darling. Give her food; give her money. Shield her from pain, and harm. Let no hand smirch my little dove. . . . It is all right, have patience, darling. Only a little time and I shall be with you. God and the angels will tend you till then."

The guards would find him on his knees, his hands raised within their manacles, his face absorbed and content.

The days passed, they lengthened into weeks, months, years. . . . Had the Conde forgotten him altogether? Was the Conde preserving him for some other, more dreadful fate? Was the Conde ill, perhaps dead?

He questioned his guards. None answered. Perhaps they did not know. Then the Conde must be still alive, for if he was dead, they would know. He tried to bribe them with little things in his possession. They were past bribing. His few pence meant nothing to them.

He asked his flute. Yes, stuck in his belt, he still had his flute. Without that he might have gone mad.

The green moss rose in the dungeon. Sometimes it looked like a creeping snake, flicking ever nearer: sometimes like the soft green collar of St. Thomas-Nicholas. With this last kindly image there swung through his mind the ageless tunes of the Basque dances. . . .

Gradually a sort of confidence began to grow in him. He thought of Andrea, who had said he was always lucky. He thought of Andrea continually, with his many tales and lives. After all, hundreds of men, who had lived before, had suffered imprisonment. Was not Alfonso

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the Sixth confined for six years in one tiny chamber, having been robbed by his brother of both wife and crown ? True, he himself had neither crown nor wife : so much the better, he had less to lose.

It was not six years yet : but if it became so, what was six years ? What of *la Dame Fidèle a Mort* ? . . .

"Have patience, my darling ; wait for me : I shall come back to you soon."

C H A P T E R X X I

I

THE first day after his departure Hili was anxious. Perro had said so certainly he would come back next day. All the other circus-hands had returned : one by one they had straggled back, in various stages of triumph, weariness or intoxication. She had run out to meet every one of them, hoping it was Perro. None of them knew anything of him. He had been all right when they saw him last—cheerful as anything : they had all gone different ways after getting their money—ha, ha, it was fun to be off the chain for once with some money in your pocket !—Though knowing that chap, one would have expected to find him the first back at the Camp.

Were they sure the boars hadn't hurt him ?—Why, of course, the boars hadn't hurt anybody. There was nothing to worry about, little one. A man often stayed away for a night or two, at a time when they were resting, could do as they liked. Yes, a man must have a little liberty occasionally : but that was nothing. He wouldn't be gone long ; today, tomorrow, he would walk in. Ah, he knew what he was about : there was another three days before they moved on.

But that very afternoon a man called at the Camp to see Senhor Lopez, the same who had come in the beginning, to raise volunteers for the hunt : yet now he looked dark and troubled, and spoke in a low voice as if weighted by some dreadful news. Senhor Lopez came fussing out, pleased to speak again with the Conde's man : at the sight of his face his own face fell. "A word with you, friend," said the horseman, and took him aside. For some time they were together, Lopez angry, alarmed, gesticulating :

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the stranger sombrely confidential. "I thought I'd tell you, since I was passing," he said as he remounted. "You might as well be warned. No need to make it public."

Lopez stared after him, his eyes bulging, shaken with apprehension. Then he walked straight to the main caravan, and with a fierce trembling hand snatched the big bugle from its peg. The summoning blast that called all circus-people together rang through the clearing.

"Pack up!" cried Lopez. "We must go, at once! Get the wagons ready, put the horses up, food or water must wait. You, get that canvas down, quick, *pressa*! Never mind packing as for the road, pile everything on the wagons best way you can, we must get away from here at once, without delay! Half an hour I give you to make a start. Leave what you can't take. Don't stand there staring like a pack of owls: hurry, hurry. Heaven curse you all!—Kranz, I want you in here."

"What's the matter, Herr Kranz? What has happened?" asked the circus-folk, as the wagons rolled creaking and rattling through the night. Without sleep, without even any evening meal, they felt exasperated and alarmed.

"That I cannot tell you. The Senhor didn't say. All he said was an unfortunate affair had taken place in the woods, and it was necessary to get away as quickly as possible. You know what it is, if anything happens, strangers in the neighbourhood are always blamed, and if they happen to be circus-people,—well, you know yourselves what little justice we get. To live in a house confers all the virtues, apparently. Not to live in one makes one capable of any crime." His large, pale face loomed gloomily in the darkness, swaying from side to side with the jerking of the cart. "But I wouldn't go near him if I were you. He seems thoroughly upset."

Senhor Lopez, indeed, was like a cat on hot bricks for several days; until, by continuous journeying, they had put considerable distance between them and the ill-fated neighbourhood. He cancelled his visit to the next town

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on the list, and progressed with all speed to a different one. They all understood, he was afraid of trouble, of losing his licence. This did not surprise them. It was not at all uncommon, if a fire broke out in a town, or if shops were looted, or any similar disaster, for the Circus to have to fly for their lives. Leading their roving, unorthodox life, strangers, always, wherever they went, they were an irresistible target for the accusation of lawless deeds.

Strangely enough, none of them associated their hurried departure with the non-appearance of Perroguet. They commiserated him, when they thought of it, on the surprise he would have, and the difficulty in overtaking their rapid marches. They did not notice how often and how curiously the Senhor looked at Marie-Céleste ; and seemed as if he would speak to her ; and turned away again in indecision, prudence, pity, and distaste. . . .

Lopez had no doubt, in his heart, of the man's innocence : he had no doubt, either, that it would be almost impossible to prove. He could not endanger the careers, perhaps the livelihoods, of all his company by rushing into an affair whose outcome Heaven alone could negotiate. Besides, what was he to him ? A flautist in the band. A dozen others could be procured at any time. Why should the whole Circus suffer for the stupidity, or whatever it was, that had got this man into this scrape ?

Nevertheless, seeing Marie-Céleste's small smiling face moving calmly about her duties, still attached to his Circus as serenely as if it were her home, he felt a surge of compassion and protectiveness, almost affection. How innocent she seemed, how trusting ! It would, of course, on the other hand, be much wiser to get rid of her. Yet who with a heart could do so ? Thus he wavered, between pity and prudence.

But Hili, though deeply puzzled, hardly wavered at all. It was strange indeed that Perro had left like that : the boars had not hurt him, the men said so : there was

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only one thing, he must have met a friend. That was the reason, without a doubt,—a sick friend. But he wouldn't be gone for long. However much he loved the friend, he would know Hili wanted him more. Look at that time before, when he had gone off with the letter, and had been away so long, they couldn't think what had happened to him, and then he had come back and taken her to the Circus!—Of course, it was a pity the Circus had moved so fast and so far, but that wouldn't matter, he knew all the roads. Besides, the longer the time, the more there'd be to tell him. Yes, that would be fun, telling him all that had happened. As to any danger that might have come to him . . . well, that was absurd. How could anything harm Perro, who was so strong, and good, and clever and brave? Just smile, that was all, that's what he would like, and wait a little while till he chose to come back.

Meanwhile everything contributed to her confidence. Once the hasty flight was over, everyone was gay, delighted to be turning towards France. It was impossible to mope or be depressed in that buoyant atmosphere. And shortly afterwards something happened that took her mind sharply away from her own preoccupations, that kept all the circus-folk busy from morning to night, practising new acts, rehearsing the old ones, refurbishing the costumes and scenery.

Signorita Rosita, who was kindness itself once again, took up every moment of Hili's time. Not content with the extremely simple contribution that Hili made in her own Act, she now practised her every morning in the ring.

Her manner was sharp and fierce, her orders peremptory. A quick fire flashed from her eyes as she cracked her whip behind the white pony, keeping it up in its jogging canter.

"Again, again!" she cried to Hili. "Head up, waist in! Feel the muscles tighten all along the *back* of your body, neck to heel. Stand square on your feet, the drum will support you. Reins firm, take their pull. That's right. Now put one foot forward; balance on the other.

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Good. Now place it on the horse's neck. Don't press. Light as air ! Let your ankle go with the motion, don't move your body. Keep looking forward. If only we had a fixed arena I would put you in the Cuerdas : that's the only way to learn. . . . Tired ? What nonsense ! You've hardly been an hour. You must do at least another two on the bars to train your muscles. How do you suppose *I* learnt ? Eight hours a day I practised, summer and winter. Huh, get off ! You make me sick. Don't *drop*, you little fool ! . . . Catch your horse, for God's sake !—Never, *never* do that again.—Now—ready ? Lift !—Jump up in *one*, can't you ?—Oh, mercy, what a jump ! Oh, Heaven, spare me ! Is that the way to balance ? Stand upright this moment ! Now, on one foot. . . . One—two !—What a sight ! A clumsier little nincompoop I never beheld. Do that twenty times. And do it right, or don't dare face me again."

Hili went through these manœuvres patiently till she was wearied almost to tears. Then, seeing her crossing the circus-ground, tired and pale, the Rosita would run to her, catch her up, hurry her to the caravan, embrace her. " You were good, my love, you were excellent. You are coming on wonderfully. But you must work. Think what it will be when you are truly skilled ! Think of the exquisite knowledge of the power of your control ! Think of the crowds, the homage, the fame ! That is worth working for. That is worth everything. Believe me, I know. Nothing is like it. Love, pleasure, pooh ! But skill, power, adulation—— ! Give me your hand. Listen to me——"

And after a while Hili would feel the magic of ambition rising in her, too. Her fair cheeks glowed, her eyes shone in responsive goodwill. She admired the Signorita intensely : she could never hope to be anything like her, but she could work hard and try her best. How lovely indeed to float round the ring engaged in some acrobatic feat, or causing some wonderful horse to obey some delicious, whimsical command. How proud Perro would be of her !

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On top of this, and not very long after Perroguet's disappearance, the whole country was galvanised by a General Jubilee, instigated in the first place as a political measure, to be a weapon against the increasing power of the Jesuits. All over the land churches were open night and day, within them religious ceremonies proceeded without intermission. A universal air of excitement prevailed : religious fervour, dividing up and running itself off into a thousand unexpected channels, received the news of the four splendid Processions that had marched through Paris, accompanied by no less a personage than the famous General, Marshal Soult, himself, bareheaded and carrying a taper, with an emotion that was extreme. Hili herself felt a personal interest : for had not Perro told her Soult had lain on the hills of Corunna over against the village where she had been found ? All those things were long since over, triumphs and defeats were alike forgotten, Napoleon himself was dead, but here was Soult, humbly acknowledging a force greater than war. With enthusiasm, the people felt all this : in emulation of the Parisian gesture, processions and ceremonies took place all over France and Spain. Every town and village was en fête, work was stopped, bands of people paraded the streets.

Of course, the Circus was crowded night after night. The performances were doubled, trebled. As fast as the crowds left, from the main exit, others collected at the entrance, to be in time for the next show. Between the performances they ranged all over the circus-ground, staring at the tents, patting the horses, peeping in at the caravan-doors, prodding the animals in the cages. For the fact was, once you had already dressed in your best to take part in some devotional exercise, and the day was a holiday and the hours spread before you and it was dull at home, what more natural than that you should migrate to the entertainment on the Common and take your fill of pleasure and wonder ?

The circus-folk were kept incessantly busy. From town to town, as they travelled, for two months, the same

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thing met them. For Hili the morning practices in the arena had to be given up, the horses were quite tired enough by the performances. Yet she continued to exercise daily on the bars, under the keen eye of her instructress, while into her ears was poured continually advice, praise, encouragement. In any case the incessant performances were rapidly increasing her skill.

II

Thus the months passed, so swiftly as to be almost unseen ; the General Jubilee, for all its excitement, faded away into the past as completely as if it had never been. But now to Hili this was of small importance, for something much more exciting and more mysterious was daily becoming apparent.

For it began to seem to her as if a whole world, of whose existence she had formerly not been aware, lay slowly opening before her. Things she had never before noticed began to take place under her eyes : their significance was confused but deeply stirring.

Wherever she went, now, men's faces turned towards her, their eyes glinting with a strange light that made her heart beat faster. Circus-hands would do little jobs for her, would stay chatting to her as long as she'd let them : the old groom, Gaugin, who did nothing now but polish the harness, brought her one day a bunch of flowers. . . . She could not thank him, she was so touched. Why couldn't she thank him ? She had never felt so queer before. It was the look on his face as he gave her them, as if he was looking at something almost holy, as if he were looking at the sun.

As soon as he had left, she went into the ring. There it was, the same look, everywhere—in the eyes of the men and the women, even in the eyes of the children. As she left the arena, a young gentleman stepped up to her, bowing.

"Beautiful Mademoiselle," he said, "let me tell you how much I adore you. Your Act is the admiration of all." His glance devoured her.

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So *that* was it. Admiration. How lovely! How pleased Perro would be.—Oh, Perro, do come back soon, quick, while I am the admiration of all!

A radiant joy suffused her. In every fibre of her body it shone. Her very skin and her hair glowed with the brightness of it: her whole being seemed to expand and blossom. On the crest of that wave of light it seemed as if all happiness flowed towards her: all around her world lay at her feet, lavishing praise and new experiences. Voices were changed, wherever she went: men broke off their words and gazed after her; women stroked her hair, patted her hands, and said that not very long ago they had looked just like her, and that she must be careful, very careful, prettiest flowers were soonest plucked; a lady came out of the audience one night and begged to have a look at her close to.

" You pretty, enchanting little creature! You are indeed quite lovely. What a bloom, what an essence! One would say a fairy. How old are you? Sixteen?—And what a charming, educated voice! One would say almost *une fée bien élevée*. Would not you, Pierre?"

Pierre looked at her in a quizzical, man-of-the-world way: he said nothing, but his eyes spoke for him.

Intoxicated by this sweet incense, Hili began to discover in herself a new, wonderful, fascinating power. It thrilled her to exert it. Wilfully, she did so. It seemed part of herself and yet at the same time something she could not control. The subtle fragrance of flattery seemed to be exhaled from every thing and every quarter she turned to: yet she herself drew it forth, unconsciously, irresistibly, as the sun draws scent from a flower.

In the meantime she continued to revolve in a full ballet-skirt of pale blue chiffon, a wreath of pink roses on her fair curls, and a glittering strap or two across her shoulders, standing in her heel-less ballet-shoes on the drum borne by a white mare whose back had developed a flatness beyond belief. Thus she would circle the ring, with the rhythmic bouncing motion of the horse's canter, and from time to time leap through the balloons, or

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paper hoops, held up and swept through her by the Clown.

Sometimes, after tearing through one of these, she would land a little on one side of the leather circle, lose her balance a trifle, descend by the hand of the ring-groom and mount again gracefully a lap or two farther on. This contrepémps, detested by Signorita Rosita, was not, however, discouraged by the ring-master, for it helped to convey to the public a sense of triumphant accomplishment of what was, in any case, not altogether an easy task. And her grace, her youth, her air of a child, made this slight performance of hers—always the first on the programme—an irresistible appeal to hearts and hands.

After this came a Clown act; then Bertrand and his cats; then the First Lady-Rider of the World.

So much had the circus performers changed since Hili had joined, that now these three were the only artistes remaining of the original company. One by one, after some altercation or other with the owner, the others had left. Senhor Lopez could never control his temper; nor they, apparently, theirs: for it was always clear afterwards that they had been foolish to leave, and that not everywhere, as the Senhor on each occasion pointed out to the survivors (and with some truth), could a master be found more kind-hearted and honest than himself.

To Bertrand, therefore, and to Signorita la Plata, and, of course, to Marie-Céleste, he seemed to extend a special favour, as members of the *old gang*.

For some unknown reason the Signorita began to dislike this designation. She shrugged her shoulders haughtily, saying *old?* with withering emphasis. She began to develop an incredible number of fads. Nothing was good enough for her: the food was uneatable: the weather was seldom to her taste: the towns they visited were tawdry and despicable. As for her costumes, it was suddenly discovered none of these properly fitted her: with immense labour the sewing-woman had to readjust them, exchanging the lace and the braid for others of much finer

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quality, and adding linings of the softest satin and most delicate silk.

Hili herself was run off her feet attending to the Signorita's whims and fancies. When it was too hot she had to fan her, when too cold she had to slap her back, her hands, her feet. The caravan was seldom now without either a burning charcoal-brazier or an immense block of ice. Delicate powders and perfumes were continually employed within it. Hours of discussion were taken up as to whether this or that angle of a head-dress was more desirable, whether this or the other colour "went" with the rest. Dressing became a lengthy and exhausting ritual. Dropping her extremely thin, yellow, blue-veined legs (which still retained their exquisite directness) over the edge of her bunk, the Signorita would require Hili to draw on for her the beautiful silk stockings of which she was so proud, turning her foot this way and that, as if observing it for the first time: then, each flimsy under-garment (of which she wore a clean set every day, it being Hili's duty to keep them washed and mended) had to be adjusted to her figure perfectly, without a wrinkle: finally the coiffure of the hair had to be completed in accordance with her own acceptance of the prevailing fashion: and at last, with a kind of mob-cap temporarily erected over this, she would sip a cup of chocolate which Hili had prepared in a corner of the caravan: nor would she allow the girl to start upon her own toilet until all these actions had been accomplished.

Hili found her early lessons in cookery useful enough now, for she was able to make on the small oil-stove concoctions of walnuts, milk and honey, of grapes, chestnuts, eggs, and mulled wine, of which the Signorita approved. When she was not doing this, with a heavy flat-iron which contained red-hot charcoal in its inner chamber, she was ironing the Signorita's handkerchiefs, bed-linen and underclothes. And what time she had to spare from these activities (and from her professional duties) she was obliged to devote to swinging on the ropes, cracking the instep, "feeding" with bit and spur, practis-

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ing a variety of equestrian gymnastics, and generally obeying the commands of the Signorita.

Alas, however hard she practised the toe-to-pommel, or the foot-on-the-neck, she seemed unable to get it just right ; and as for the horses, although she loved them all, and would cheerfully have groomed and fed them herself, she found it impossible to force them to give her the strict, automatic obedience they accorded their mistress. Even Alfonzo, the veteran, who could do his tricks, as they said, in his sleep, seemed to prefer, when with her, to pretend a misunderstanding of her gentle proddings and pullings, the "aids" of her art, and, turning towards her his wise old eyes, would merely edge his muzzle quietly towards the small pocket which he knew held carrots or sugar. Such an irregularity would never have been tolerated for a second by the Signorita, and Hili was ashamed of it herself : and even more ashamed to find that she loved Alfonzo all the better for this friendliness of his ; and that he knew this, also.

She began to realise that all the horses, including even Alfonzo, executed their tricks and their beautiful unnatural paces not only from habit, but also from fear : fear, not so much from memory of what had happened to them in the past or during their training, but of what might happen to them in some vague, unguessable, but certainly painful way, if they disobeyed their orders ; fear, in short, of the personality of the Signorita. And this was one thing, at least, in which she could never resemble her teacher : for nothing on earth, man or beast, could fear Hili.

Even the Signorita sometimes saw this. "Come, stupid girl !" she said in one of her flashes of petulance that contrasted so sharply with the soft, exquisite, expensive things with which she surrounded herself. "Use your firmness ! Make them feel, make them know you their master ! Haven't you any will at all ? Exert it, *exert* it, for God's sake ! What are they for, but to obey you ? —Now listen, you who are often chattering about things that don't concern you, silly matters about Napoleon or

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the Pope—far above your head, my child, and not really interesting, in any case,—listen to this. This is what Napoleon said when conquering a new country: ‘First make oneself feared, then loved.’ I heard that only the other day and it made me think perhaps there was more in that man than I’d realised: yes, perhaps the tales of his horsemanship are true, after all. For you see, that is true about horses, even I myself could not have put it better. And don’t you forget it. *Feared.* In any case, what is the good of the love of horses? Pooh! ”

And Hili would hang her head very humbly, aware more than ever of her shortcomings: her ineptitude as a horsewoman and her total lack of the quality of inspiring fear was clearer to herself at this time than it seemed to be to her instructress: who instantly followed her lecture with a command relating to her own desires.

Running about thus on errands, cooking, washing, ironing, sewing little frills into the Rosita’s underclothes, and doing a hundred similar services, in addition to the Circus requirements, Hili had little time to indulge her own preoccupations, or to enquire more minutely into the new, exhilarating world that blossomed ever before her. One moment she was on the pinnacle of light, in fact, the admiration of all, as she executed her simple evolutions on her milk-white steed; the next moment she was again the Signorita’s little slave. To each calling she gave the same graceful, happy and willing obedience.

But between these moods the undercurrents of her thoughts were filled with perplexity about Perroquet. He had been away so long now. Could he not even have written? He did not write well, that was true, but there were many who did: their hire, as one knew, cost little. Why didn’t he return? Why didn’t he write? What, oh what, could have happened?

At night, when the Circus was quiet, when the last light had been extinguished, when the tired circus-hands slept like the dead, wrapped in their blankets under the wagons, when the animals slumbered peacefully at their pickets or within their cages, when even the last important little

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yapping dog had consented to abandon its guard to the silent protection of the dark, these thoughts possessed her, filled with an overwhelming sadness.

She still lay in the caravan with the Signorita, the latter on the bunk, she on a straw mattress on the floor. Here she would lie, wide-awake in the darkness, raking her mind for a reason for Perroquet's absence, and wondering why Senhor Lopez looked at her in such a strange manner, and bade her so fiercely not to worry her head about it, whenever she questioned him. . . . The happy incessant toil of the day sank away now as if it had never been : instead, there reigned only a deep, hungry aching for the voice, the smile, the loved comforting presence that nothing could supplant.

What *could* be keeping Perro ? Why was he doing this ? Was it to try her, to test her ? Was it a sort of a—joke ? They had had so many jokes, he and she, how they had laughed and enjoyed everything ! But this—this wasn't a joke. When months passed, it wasn't a joke any longer. 'I—I must not cry,' thought Hili fiercely, 'he wouldn't like me to cry. He's never even seen me cry, except that time when I threw that egg at the boy. That was temper, I expect. I've never felt like that again. Besides, I was only a little girl then. No, he mustn't think I've cried. When he comes back I know what he would like—to think I've been always happy, as when we were together. Oh, Perro, be happy too. Darling Perro, remember I'm here still ; I'll be just the same, whenever you come back.'

The caravan was green outside, but within it had recently been painted, by the Signorita's orders, a deep yellow. It seemed as if, from some inner poverty, she required this glow. The dim light came in through the window from the starshine outside : kneeling on her mattress, Hili could look out without making any noise, or disturbing the sleeper. Some far, some near, the stars glittered contentedly in their own places. "Stars, you can look down on Perro. Tell him from me that I wonder where he is. Tell him I think of him and love him. Tell

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him I'm waiting. Tell him not to be too long.—I wonder whether, perhaps, tomorrow, before the stars shine again, Perro will come walking in, telling me all that has happened ? ”

Comforted, in some measure, she lay again on her mattress ; cautiously as ever so as to make no sound. The wind of the night moved aside the little sprigged curtain at the window : the interior of the caravan seemed to show and to shift faintly, its nearness or farness seemed as vague as the interstellar spaces. The whole of the tiny glowing room seemed to be floating on the air, swaying a little, and swimming up into the silence and the starshine. And everything within it was shadowy and unreal—the outline of the shelves, piled with neatly stacked shoes, combs, bottles, pots ; the dark oblong of the lantern hanging from its hook in the centre ; the glimmering white sheets with which the Signorita protected her costumes from the dust of travel : the polished bits and stirrups which she insisted on hanging from a nail in the wall above her own bed ; the glossy scarlet bridle of Alfonzo, studded with silver stars, that had under the cheek-piece the hidden silver spur. All these familiar details seemed dream-like and remote,—even the long form on the bunk, whose dark head and sharp greyish face could be seen outlined against the warm wood. . . .

But although she had made no sound, hardly breathed, a restless movement began to betray that the other slept not either. The figure turned sharply, the thin purple silk of the coverlet twisted in screwed folds around the lean body : Signorita Rosita leaned on one elbow, her burning eyes piercing the darkness. Hili lay quite still.

“ Are you awake, child ? ”

“ Yes, Signorita.”

“ Then go to sleep again at once ! ”

“ Yes, Signorita.”

“ And for Heaven's sake don't keep on calling me Signorita ! ”

There was no reply, no noise but the soft whick-whicker of the little curtain flapping in the breeze.

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Without explanation, after a minute or two, without warning, a long shuddering sigh came from the Signorita's lips. The sound lay on the stillness as if the whole emotion of a life had been offered in that single act ; as if it had been offered, but had found no hand to take it, and must hang now for ever upon the air ; like the bodies of mariners that can neither sink nor float, who have died, unabsolved, at sea. . . .

Into the silence that followed it the Signorita's words came slowly, dropping like honey, or the tired flowers of clematis. Something in their tone, urgent, soft, yet filled with pain, caused Hili to tremble, as a leaf trembles before the first warm gusts that presage the storm.

" Am I so old, Marie-Céleste ? Am I so old as all that ? See, my dear little fairy-child, am I not beautiful, strong, skilled ? Look at me ; look at me at once ! When I look in your eyes I see I am all these things. I see, I know at once the world is my slave, just as you are. And I, too, am young still. I have everything, everything ! And you who are so lovely and so young and yet have nothing —are you afraid of me, little one ? You must not be. Come, come near to me. Let me feel your warmth. Think of me as a—as a kind sister. Look up, answer. Never say Signorita again. Can you not call me Rosita ? Listen, you shall call me Rosa if you like."

With those burning fingers on her wrist Hili could do nothing but shiver and tremble and offer little words of devotion and humility : but even as she spoke the Signorita loosed her grip, and flung the hand away, turning to the wall and whispering over and over the words "*Rosa, Rosa, Rosa !*" as if abandoning herself to some torturing recollection.

The crushed and twisted purple silk turned darker and darker and then became a faint grey as the morning light opened, and the first thing Hili heard was the Signorita's cold voice, demanding the implements of her toilet. Hili was frightened by her behaviour. She obeyed quietly.

After this, though her mood changed as often as the

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flight of a bird, the Signorita spoke to her frequently during the many nights when both lay sleepless. Sometimes she spoke of the triumphs of her past, sometimes of her future, sometimes of how she despised applause, sometimes of how she lived for it alone. Whatever it was, it seemed to come sincerely out of her mind, as if the unnatural glitter and pride and keen self-will of the day were a cloak she was glad to discard when she was tired.

Utterly relaxed on her bunk, one arm thrown out, the hand resting on the floor, the other conveying to her mouth a small scented segar (to soothe, she said, her nerves, she who had claimed always to have none), she would fling out a few words, inconsequently, into the darkness.

. . . "Never you marry, Marie-Céleste. So many girls marry, and that's the end of them. Houses, babies, washing-up. That's all you get out of marriage. Troubles, anxieties, responsibilities. Never your own mistress. No peace, no happiness. Everyone demanding something or other. Nothing ever for yourself . . ."

"But doesn't your husband love you if you are married ? "

"My poor child: quite soon your husband ceases to love you, and nobody else is allowed to. But while you're unmarried you are free. Free ! Let them all crowd round you, let them vie with each other, let them pay court. You can choose which you like ; one today and another tomorrow, if you wish it. Yes, that's the thing, keep your freedom, and by that, believe me, you'll keep their love. But what am I saying ? *Their love ?*" She struck the segar sharply with her hand and blew upon it to restore its fire. "What's the worth of a man's love ? All vanity, foolishness, waste of time ! "

"I do not, in any case, intend to marry, Sign—Rosita," said Hili gravely.

"That's right. That's the only way to trick them," cried the Rosita. She glowed behind the light of her weed as if she had achieved a personal triumph, and

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raising her other hand she began softly to clap the under-side of her calves, a necessary and stimulating movement for the muscles, as if by this action she proclaimed the superiority of trained skill over the petty callings of the hearth.

"But it isn't for that reason," said Hili. She paused ; and then her words came forward in a rush. "There's only one man in the world I want. There's only one man I shall ever want ! If I had Perro again, who else could I wish to have with me ? It's Perro I'm waiting for, really."

"Ah," said Rosita very slowly. She stretched herself out and remained quite still. "That was a good man, that one," she said in an altered voice. "I could see that. And I have seen a good many. You are lucky, indeed." She turned to Hili as if she would add more, but relapsed again, without speaking, into the dimness of her own thoughts.

And Hili's eyes filled with tears. Those kind words, speaking of Perro, they choked her heart to bursting with gratitude and emotion : on that tide came his voice and his smiling eyes and the very feel of the knowledge of his nearness to her, the touch and the smell of his rough coat, and of his strong, warm, clasping brown hand.

"Oh, I'm so glad, I'm so *glad* you feel that ! Because he is—he is quite different from anybody. Nobody could be like him. It's because he understands everything. He can do anything, he is so clever, and he would do anything to help anybody because his heart is so kind. That's why everybody loves him. He isn't my father, of course. He isn't anything to me really. But nobody's father could be more than he is, he's a friend too, even a brother. I've never had anyone but him, he's all I remember from the beginning. We've always been together, he and I. When I was little, I used to sit in a cradle on his back. And then I used to hit the drum when he sang. Oh, we were happy. He sang so beautifully. He said one day I should paint his tunes, and turn them into rivers or clouds. That was before we came

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here. After that it was better than ever. I didn't mind the crowds, I didn't mind what I did in the ring, for he was in the band and we were together. Everything he had he shared with me, and so did I. And then he loved animals. Not like other people do, but more as friends. Once we had a lizard,—I, I don't know why I'm telling you this. . . . One could tell anything to Perro. Whatever it was, he understood. Things that puzzled one, things that turned out differently, or had a different meaning. And they puzzled him too, sometimes. But we didn't mind that. We'd talk about it, and then perhaps we'd see a reason. But now there isn't anybody. . . . I can't tell my feelings, I can't say what I think strange or funny. He always would see at once what was strange, and he'd be interested; and he'd always see what was comic, and oh how he'd laugh! But now no one understands. It isn't that they're not kind; you're very, *very* kind, Signor—Rosita. It's just that they can't understand. You see——”

“How do you mean, I can't understand?”

The Signorita sat up abruptly, flaming. Her annoyance swept out of her like a desert wind, scorching all it touched, drying up at once all her softness of feeling. “You silly little fool, what do you think there is in the world that I can't understand? Whom do you think you are speaking to? Is he the only person in the world? What about me, what about me? Haven't I looked after you all this time, ever since you first joined the Circus? Without me, what would you have been? A useless, helpless, gaping little bundle, capable only of staring after that man with his idiotic flute. *Understand*, indeed! Is it not enough for me to give you a place with me here, to teach you, to train you, to give you advice, without having you insult me to my face, a worthless little chit like you? Go to sleep. I'm tired of you. I'm absolutely sick of you. Who gave you leave to give out your miserable grumblings? Who cares a peseta for your ridiculous feelings, keeping me awake all night? Silence! Don't answer! Don't you dare speak to me any more.”

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This was a lesson to Hili. She never let her tongue run away with her again.

But already by the next evening the Signorita seemed to have forgotten it.

The weather again was warm and gracious, the performances were crowded, the applause unfailingly enthusiastic. The circus-people were preoccupied as ever with their unremitting duties, and among them all the Rosita moved with the pride of a queen; and with, also, it began to be observed, an added something in her bearing, which increased mysteriously as the days passed. If the word coquetry had not been too startling a word to use in connection with this high-tempered lady, that would have described the melting glances, the pretty bridling, the tossing head and provocative mien that she carried with her now around the ring and flung to the audiences, in addition to her exhibition of a lady-Hussar or a lady-dervish employing the Pésade, the Croupade, or the Moyen de Surfaix Cavalier.

A pleased, triumphant flush mantled her cheeks, usually so pale, as she leant against the taut ropes outside the main tent, balancing herself with grace, and looking with a challenging brightness into the eyes of Kranz, who had never before seen her do anything but stalk straight back to her caravan when her Act was over.

"Did I do that well, Kranz? Tell me, was I not superb? Even, don't you think, a little better than last night? Did you not like the new bit where I make Alfonzo salute? Aha, yes, don't tell me. I know what you would say only too well!"

With a flash of her eyes and a swish of her heavily furred skirt she strode away: the circus-hands looked after her, grinning.

Kranz was bewildered. Accustomed to incomprehensible temperaments, he still could find no reason for this sudden and belated inflorescence. Well, it did not matter as long as she did her work: she was good for another four or five years at least, that is, at her present salary: in any case, she was certainly very talented, and

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these thin women wore well. Still, she had never before asked him, or, as far as he knew, any other human being, whether she had done her Act well. . . .

Within her own caravan her mood was the same. Hili was forced to take part in endless discussions as to the qualities of this head-dress, the line of that costume, the exact angle of the fall of a skirt over Alfonzo's burnished back. "With this bonnet well on the one side I can take the hair a little higher from the forehead, eh? What do you think?—Or perhaps showing the ear a little more? Yes, I think I will show my ears. They are small, and lovely, and have hardly ever been seen. Most women who have shown their ears all their lives have grown to have such very, very ugly ones! Is this feather right, do you think? Does it tone with my skin? You must alter that blue bodice, it's too loose in the waist. Buttons and braid must have a very tight waist. Did you notice how the people loved me in the yellow? And as the Turk in the second gallop?—I thought the roof would come off! Tell me, did you observe whether my plume seemed handsome enough when I came in at the last? How would it be if I had it thus? Give me this. . . . Hand me that. . . . Hold the mirror properly, I can hardly see. . . ."

But though the words were much as before the tone was soft, gay, contented: it seemed as if the distracted desires of the last months, the silk frills, the perfumes, the braziers, the yellow paint, had combined at last to some perfect consummation in the Signorita's mind.

But Hili was no longer bewildered.

III

For every evening, nowadays, a bouquet of flowers arrived for the Signorita at the caravan.

The old groom Gaugin brought the first one, a magnificent handful of white lilies, given to him, he had explained with a grin, by a splendid, passionate young gentleman from the most expensive seats, who had turned away as soon as he had thrust it into his hand, and had

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lost himself in the crowd. Since the card attached to the lilies was inscribed, "To the world's most Accomplished and Enchanting Equestrienne," he had brought it of course at once to the Erste Jockey, Reiterin der Welt. See, the flowers were not crushed, they were just as he had received them.—He stood there, scratching the back of his head, grinning, and throwing out hints for a rewarding coin in place of that which the young gentleman in his nervous haste and agitation had omitted to give him.

Rosita took one swift stride to the caravan door, at the bottom of whose steps stood the old groom proffering the flowers. The flare of the torchlight cut his aged features into sharp blocks of black and gold, and yellowed with a tender mist the huge blossoms, exquisite and mortal offering of love. She leant over the steps, seized the flowers in one swift movement, burying her face in them as if lost to all onlookers ; and at last, with an expression in her eyes that Hili had never before seen, thrust into the man's hand a gold piece.

This was the beginning. Since then they had come with regularity, the beautiful formal bouquets, lilies, carnations, myrtle, heliotrope, always with their neat, charming card. "To the most Admirable Lady, from the Humblest of her Adorers."—"To the One who Alone is Fairer than These."—"To the Peerless Diana, and Fair Dompteuse of Hearts."

It was always Gaugin who brought them.

"What is he like, what is he like ?" the Signorita asked him, glowing and flashing as she stood in the doorway.

"Oh, young, young. Ardent. Splendid. A prince ! Yet bashful. Yes, that is it. Ardent, yet bashful. Rare, delicious combination ! And handsome, oh, so handsome. An Apollo. Full of force, fire, romance. Yes. And rich, rich. Oh, a veritable mine of virtue. Fortunate Signorita ! Or shall I say, fortunate lover ! 'Did you take it to the lady ?' he asks me. 'Yes,' I say, 'to the very door of her caravan.' You should see how

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his eyes burn. Yes. Oh, yes!" Gaugin hiccupped. "One day he will come here. Oh, yes, one day he will bring them in person and lay them at your feet."

He hiccupped again. He seemed to have money for drink these days. Indeed it had become already clear that the young gentleman's omissions had not been as he had declared.

And the Signorita grew ever gayer, softer, prouder, more resplendent. She drew the breath of the flowers into her heart as if to suffuse its fibres with their youth and fragrance ; she seemed to feed upon their very shapes and colours as they stood in the earthen jar on the shelf at her bed's head ; when she turned at night in her bunk she could almost caress them with her lips.

The card was never detached from them, whether they were in water or no. By degrees it became more intimate, "To the Vision of Beauty and Love. *You were wonderful to-night.*"—"To the Beautiful Lady-Centaur, or the Elegant Valkyrie. *When may I speak to you?*"

Rosita made no effort to return these favours or to meet her admirer : at first, indeed, she appeared almost to shrink from the thought : and then she seemed to hold it within her, this prospect, as something which would one day of its own accord beautifully come to fruit ; that she could envisage in some soft trembling dream, wherein she herself was as beautiful, seen close, as she was seen across the blazing, coloured, and flattering lights of an unnatural world. . . . And meanwhile the tender bouquets continued to arrive.

And Hili, too, was glad. She shared the pleasure of the flowers ; their scent refreshed her, also, as she came in, weary as the others, from the dirty and trampled circus-ground. It was good to wake in the night and see their happy faces which somehow reminded her of Perro, and of lying beside him, eating fruit on a grassy bank with orange-blossoms falling through the quiet air. And in the morning it was better still to find them there yet, unaltered in expression, stable and welcoming like Perro himself. There they would be, between her and those

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sharp features, the cold, kind, hot, harsh, soft, fierce, unguessable face of her mistress. . . .

But particularly she rejoiced for the happiness of Rosita. Her warm little soul expanded in the glow of the other's successes, if that was what they were : they brought joy to her, at least, and a sort of exultant peace, for which Hili joined a congratulation gratefully and with sincerity. For the lady had been kind indeed—think of all she had taught her!—and if she, Hili, could not adore her as much as she could have wished to do, owing to the fact that, in spite of everything, a little trace of fear of her still remained, it was so much the better that some other admirer had been forthcoming out of the unknown, to fill the cold spaces in that incomprehensible heart.

Between these thoughts and feelings and conversations, every evening the Circus performances went on. The programme varied a little : it would not do to have all the turns every night, particularly the more spectacular ones : Lopez tried to arrange to hold something back always, so that one would have to visit the performance five or six times to see the whole of the acts that were mentioned in the Bill. This sometimes caused grumbling in the audience, but in the end it was found satisfactory to the exchequer : it gave, besides, to the more important artistes a sense of exclusiveness, and to the public a sense of receiving a special honour when it did behold them. Signorita Rosita de la Plata figured, of course, among the exclusives : while Hili, in her simple Act, ranked with the Chorus and the pad-horses and the troupes of athletes, and did her work every evening, as much a part of the regular programme as the band. For all that, she was received quite often with a little whirlwind of brávas, to which she always smiled politely, bowed with grace as Perro had taught her, and kissed her hand. As soon as she could, she slipped off to the food-tent to have her supper, not daring to loiter or to chat, but wondering only whether she had left anything undone for the Signorita, and what more would be required of her that night.

On evenings when the Signorita was not giving a per-

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formance Hili's duties always seemed to be more numerous than usual, more lengthy, and more exacting : and it would always appear, too, somehow, that their necessity had been enhanced by her own stupidity or carelessness.

Thus, coming one evening to the caravan after the show, she was not surprised to be greeted from the shadows of the bunk, whither the Signorita had already retired, by a querulous voice recounting all her neglectful acts of the day.

" There is no oil for the lantern. How is it you did not fill the lantern this morning ? The light was so small I could scarcely undress. Positively, I had to go to bed in the dark. I even looked for the oil-can, but I could not find it. I called for you. Then I remembered. Where were you ? Smirking about in the ring somewhere. Off you'd gone, without thinking of whether I'd got enough oil. I told you to wash this coverlet this morning. Did you ? No. Why not ?—Don't answer ! You forgot, that was why. You all forget me. When I'm not in the limelight you forget I'm alive. And what a ridiculous noise there was this evening. I could hear it from here. What a crowd finds to admire in a couple of stupid clowns and an imbecile dog or two I've never understood. I suppose it was that trapezist, it's his night tonight. A more inane performance could not be imagined. Who cares if he risks his neck ? There's no skill in it. Muscle, that's all. Where are those stockings I told you to mend ? I couldn't find my chocolate, you know I like it left on the shelf by my bed. Thank Heavens these roses arrived in time to save my reason. Yes, the World, at least, knows my value. Even then I could hardly see to put them in water. I——"

Hili was quite overwhelmed with her stricken conscience. " I am so very, very sorry, Sign—Rosita. How could I have forgotten so many things ? I am so sorry you were here in the dark. Wait—let me feel. Why, here is the oil-can, upon the shelf, only pushed a little farther back. I'll take down the lantern at once and fill it in a minute. Yes, now you'll soon have a light. It is

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so horrid, I know, to be alone in the dark. There, I'll trim the wick too. I'll never, never forget to do it again. I just know how lonely you must have felt, hearing the crowd, too. Now, *there's* a fine light! And look, here's your chocolate too, after all! Shall I heat it again? It must have got hidden behind the jar, I expect. Or—let me think. I think I could run across to the food-tent, the flag's down, but Gertrude would give me a kettle, I know. I could brew you that drink you like so much, *tea*; it only needs boiling water. I've saved some of the leaves since last time. Would that please you, dear Signorita? You look cold, a little. While you are drinking it I could rub your feet, the way that sends you to sleep. I'm so sorry I've been so thoughtless and stupid. Do, do, please forgive me."

Rosita turned and looked at her. Under the swaying glow of the lantern Hili stood, the light gleaming upon her fair brow. Her cheeks were still flushed from the night air and the swing of her horse's canter and the excited surge of the crowd's applause, her eyes were bright with the ineradicable radiance of youth, her golden curls glittered to her shoulders, above the brief straps and the gauzy tinsel skirts of her circus-dress, not yet removed: but on her face, stamped over its brightness, dwelt only a soft, child's look of anxious compassion.

For some reason the sight sickened her. A kind of hatred of so much youth, unstudied charm, sympathy even, invaded her abruptly. Though she had been screaming for it a minute ago, sympathy, she felt all at once, was the one thing she couldn't stand. "No!" she cried sharply. "I don't want any of those things! And don't tell me I look cold. How dare you tell me I look cold?—*Cold!* You don't even know what that word means,—silly, ignorant stupid little creature! Leave me alone, that's all I ask. Take off those ridiculous things, and get into bed and put out the light. Faugh! I cannot bear to look at you! Thank God my roses are here to look at instead; yes, my faithful flowers, my——"

She broke off. An extraordinary silence, sharp as an

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icicle, suddenly sprang across the room. For a second nothing moved, except the lantern, still swaying slightly. In its light Rosita leant on one elbow, gazing at the bouquet beside her with eyes that looked as if they saw a ghost. From the flowers a card depended, written with the usual bold, romantic hand: the words were clear to each of them in that small space between the walls: "To the Most Ravishing and Adorable Equestrienne, Mlle. Marie-Céleste."

With fingers that were curiously stiff as a stone Rosita lifted the card. Below was written: "*Let me meet you at last, I entreat you, fairest lady. I can bear it no longer.*"

As her mind took the meaning her lips parted, she stared, unseeing: then clasping both hands over her heart she uttered a cry so shrill, so dreadful, that it seemed to bear no human note: at that scream of animal pain the very boards that stopped it trembled.

With one swift movement she snatched the flowers, dripping, from the vase, the thorns pricked her grasp; suddenly, with all her force she flung them to the other end of the caravan. They struck the wooden wall with a scratching sound of claws.

She leapt from her bed, gaunt and towering in her night-attire, and shaking with the ungovernable feelings of her rage. Her mouth worked, unable to give passage to her mind's tumult. Then the words came, pouring, disconnected, flying out like red-hot coals.

"So; *this* is how you deceive me? Liar! Base, loathsome hypocrite! Worthless and despicable wanton! What a mean trick! What a low, paltry, sneaking, snake's trick! Did you meet him, did you change him, did you snatch his thoughts away?—Or no, no! Could they have been yours? Was it *you*, the Most—? Oh, —get out of my sight! Disgraceful, detestable object! How I hate you, how I detest you! Come near me and I'll scratch your eyes out! Don't—"

"But, Signorita, I—"

"Don't speak to me! Don't dare to open your mouth!"

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I see the whole thing. I understand it all. You think you're beautiful, I suppose. You think you're lovely, ravishing, a fine thing it is to discover you have an admirer. 'Most Admirable——' Pooh, pooh ! I could laugh till I cried at such a pathetic, ridiculous travesty ! Oh, help me, Mother of Heaven, how can I support my mirth ! A half-wit he must be, that's plain, this wonderful cavalier ! As for you—let me tell you, a more hideous kind of little dishcloth I never beheld. Everyone knows it, everyone pities you. It is only I that have kept this fact from you, out of kindness. Yes, yes, it is only my kind heart that has pleaded with the Senhor to allow you to stay on here at all. Yes, hideous camarón, learn it at last, it's only through me, me, you get a footing here ! Who would endure such an ugly, vile face in the arena but for that ? You thought it was your own skill—ha, ha ! Don't look at me like that, don't open your eyes like that. Here—go ! Go, do you hear ? Don't stare ! Get out. Get out at once. I won't have you here another minute. Not a second ! Move, can't you ? Get away from my caravan. I'll throw you out ! I'll—where's my horse-whip ? Ah, that made you jump ! ”

She flung open the caravan door and, turning, struck Hili with all her force towards it. The girl stumbled at the doorway and collapsed on the ground at the foot of the steps.

Rosita was screaming at the pitch of her voice : the words “Liar ! Thief ! Hypocrite !” rang across the silent air. A few faces appeared at the openings of tents, one or two men came out from behind the wagons and looked on for a minute, grinning, before turning away.

The little figure of Senhor Lopez traversed the grass. “Ladies, ladies !” He came fussing forwards. (Where the devil was Kranz ? He was the better at dealing with these things.) “Ladies, ladies, please ! I beg you, less disturbance. We cannot have quarrels. What's the trouble, what is the trouble ? ”

He saw the tall form of Rosita framed in the doorway, her face livid, her eyes circled with dark rings of passion

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and fury, a torrent of abuse and scorn pouring from her lips, mixed with the words : " Youth ! Beauty ! Diana ! Exquisite Lady-Centaur ! " Lopez was utterly bewildered. Several times he tried to interpose, whenever he did so Rosita turned like a tigress upon him.

Then he, too, lost his temper.

" Shut up, will you ! Shut up, you squalling shehyena ! All the world knows what's the matter with *you*. You're jealous ! You're a rickety old woman and you're nearly finished—do you think I don't know it ? You've been making yourself a laughing-stock for weeks. Leave the girl alone. What harm has she done you ? "

A terrible silence intervened.

" So ; I'm to be shut up, am I ? Perhaps you'd like me to go, altogether ? I will, certainly, with pleasure ; and I'll take my horse Alfonzo with me, and the others too. Oh, no, I'm not nearly finished ; if you think so you are quite mistaken, I assure you. But one thing *is* certain, either I go or that creature does ! That vile, sneaking creature does ! I couldn't be under the same top with her ever again, not for a moment ! "

" But what have I done ? " said Hili. She could not repress her sobs.

It had now begun to rain slightly : her tears and the rain-drops trickled on her cheeks, her bare shoulders glistened with the wet, and her flimsy clothing began to cling to her body, looking draggled in the bright path of light from the caravan.

" What have you done ? Don't ask me. *You* should know what *you've* done, you and your pretty amante !—Here, take these. Don't forget—they're yours ! " With a furious gesture Rosita turned, swept up the bunch of roses where it had fallen by the door, and hurled it as far as she could into the darkness. A ploppy sound announced its descent somewhere in a puddle : bringing with it at once the vision of the flowers, torn, slashed with rain and fouled with the wet brown mire.

The next instant the Signorita was flinging down from the caravan every one of Hili's belongings : flop, flop, they

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fell around her, as if they were thunderbolts from the passion of the storm that was raging above.

Too dazed, too overwhelmed by the sudden, inexplicable turn of events to do anything but sob, and shiver, and murmur brokenly her sorrow for whatever she had done amiss, Hili would have let them lie : but Lopez, on whom the soaking shower was already having a sobering effect, motioned her to pick up what she could, and with a final shout of masterly repartee at his star performer, which appeared to refer in equally opprobrious terms to her parentage and to her salary, he turned to go.

Instantly, the caravan door was banged to, their light was cut off, and in the wet darkness they were obliged to find their way over the tussocky grass and the taut ropes and pegs.

"Eh, this is a bad business," sighed Lopez, thinking of Rosita's furious face : but he did not question Hili on the cause of the quarrel. At last he came to the tent he was looking for. No light showed within it.

"Hey, Maria!" he cried, "are you awake still ? Get up, let Marie-Céleste in. Be quick, it's raining." There was no answer. "She sleeps like the devil, this old woman," he said. "Still, you should find some room in here, between the bags of clothes. Get in, now, get in. Now you'll be all right." He turned away with relief as if he felt these arrangements, this women's business, beneath his dignity. (Where the devil was Kranz?)

It was the tent of Maria, the ancient sewing-woman of the Circus. Hili's hands were too numbed and the strings were too slippery with wet for her to undo them, yet it was rude to keep the Senhor waiting, in the rain ; she dropped to her knees and, lifting the flap at the entrance, crawled in under it.

For a long time she lay there, seeking what comfort she could in some posture among the stacked articles on the ground, shivering in her thin and wet circus-clothes, unable to sleep, and going over and over in her mind the last violent surprising scenes. At last the angry distorted features of the Signorita faded, her harsh voice was heard

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no more, it dwindled only to the snoring of the old woman a few feet away, and that also finally dissolved into silence, a slow gentle warmth began to pass into her limbs from the heaped materials among which she lay: and on this glow came the dear, crinkled brown face of Perro looking at her tenderly.

"Don't let's ever part again, Perro!"

And his firm, cheerful voice: "Never again, my darling, while I am alive!"

C H A P T E R X X I I

I

IT was difficult, during the next few days, to become accustomed to her new surroundings : or rather, to become accustomed to seeing her old surroundings from a new angle. The work, the meals, the practices, the rests, went on as before : but after her parting with Rosita, Hili found she was able to see this lady for the first time with the eyes of others. Seen thus, she looked hard, shrivelled, yellow ; the cruel, determined crease between her eyes was a thing one had not noticed before. The rest of the circus-people had little to do with her ; she was proud, they said, she preferred to be aloof, she thought herself too grand to mix with others, she never opened her mouth except to address one of her horses. And indeed, seeing that remote, angular figure moving about as coldly as if nothing had happened, it was almost impossible to Hili to believe she had ever uttered the words that still rang in her ears.

She kept out of her way as much as she could—what else was there to do ?—and she made herself useful in helping Maria to stitch and mend the clothing, between the needs of the performances.

As for the gallant young sender of the flowers, his fate was settled automatically : for within two days of the bouquet of roses the whole Circus was moved on to its next destination.

And, strange to say, the Signorita came too. Yes, somehow or other, the affair was patched up. Herr Kranz was seen going to her caravan on two or three occasions, and his well-known conciliatory personality apparently did the rest. Thus she continued to exist

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as one of the biggest attractions on the Bill, while remaining to the rest of her fellow-artistes as frigidly impersonal as the ropes and the poles that held up the spaces wherein they all lived. Her Act being about the last on the programme, while Hili's was almost the first, they generally avoided each other successfully, and if by chance they did meet it was as if the Signorita had never seen the girl before.

"Yes, you did well to cut yourself off from that trying old harridan," said one of the girls, observing such an encounter. "Blood-sucker, that's what she is. And vain—my word! Thinks everyone's in love with her. Gaugin's just been telling me something about some admirer—it wasn't very clear, Gaugin's getting a bit bottled these days—but whatever it was, it must have been too funny. She with an admirer! Can you imagine it! All her own invention, you may be sure. Something about some flowers, he was saying. He-he, isn't that rich! As if anyone would give her anything. A good setting-down is what I'd like to give her, vain, conceited, rude old hag!"

Hili flushed.

"She's a very nice person," she said. "She has been wonderfully kind to me. Why, she taught me everything I know, about my work, that is. She isn't vain at all, or rude either: it isn't that. You don't understand. She just wants someone to—well, perhaps it sounds silly to say it. But when you know her properly you see how lonely she is, and yet she never gives in: and she's terribly honest, too. And I can't tell you how good she's been to me; I don't know what I would have done after—after . . . well, I couldn't possibly help being grateful to her. I didn't cut myself off at all. It was only a sort of—mistake."

"Well, have it your own way. I suppose you'd be running after her still if it hadn't been for this mistake, whatever it was. Anyway, who cares? *Vive la Rosita—à bas la Rosita*, it's all the same to me! Who'll come with me to the Canteen?"

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But the thought of the Signorita remained with Hili, and the knowledge that now she was alone, with none to cook her chocolate, or rub her feet, or bring her blocks of ice. How was she getting on? Was she comfortable? Perhaps it would be kind, that evening, when the caravan was empty, just to run in and tidy it up: Rosita wouldn't know she'd been there, she didn't always notice things clearly (look how she hadn't seen the oil-can that night when it was there all the time), but she'd just feel tidier, and more peaceful, and happier.

With her mind filled with these thoughts, Hili could utter only a cry of surprise, almost of anguish, in the rush of her emotion, when, stepping out from her tent that evening, Rosita herself suddenly appeared before it, and with a convulsive movement threw her long arms around her, hugging her as if her heart would break.

"Marie-Céleste, come back to me! My dear, adorable little fairy, I cannot live without you! I need you. I miss you. You gave me something which no one has ever given me. No one else could be what you were, always there, always smiling, singing. I wake in the night and your place is empty. I look at your mattress —yes, I've kept that, just in the same spot, though I can't bear to see it. Come back to me, Marie-Céleste! I shall die if you do not. I've never loved anyone like you. And all my things are getting muddled, too. I can't look after them. Even my thoughts, they don't obey me any longer. Come back, say you will. Come back now! Let us think again, as before, only of our horses, and our powers, and our great, wonderful profession. First Rider of the World! You could be that too, in time, if you practise—practise: do as I tell you:—" . . .

Hili was trembling herself in the strange, shaking grip, she felt terrified and yet absorbed by the passion pouring itself out, choking, through these words: and there is little doubt she would have become again, from that moment, the Signorita's obedient little slave, had not a

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heavy shuffling tread approached the tent at that instant, heralding the arrival of Maria.

"No, you don't!" said that worthy, grasping the situation in a glance. "This is exactly what Herr Kranz warned me to expect. You stay *here*, my girl, that's my orders. And I haven't been on circus-lots for fifty years without getting myself obeyed. As for you, Madame, this is not your tent, I believe? No; your property is quite at the other end of the show-ground. Would you mind stepping aside? This hut belongs to Senhor Lopez, and as it contains all his valuable costumes and materials, I have to be very careful whom I am allowed to admit."

"How dare you!" cried Rosita furiously. "How *dare* you, woman, address me in that tone! Hands off! Don't touch me. And fear nothing. I shall take the greatest care not to come where I may run the risk of setting eyes on you again!"

The spell had been broken, Hili was forgotten. Rosita stalked away with swift, angry strides: Maria, her hands on her enormous hips, looked after her, smiling. "Ya, ya," she said, padding into the tent, "that was a fine one, I've no doubt, in her time."

Thus matters were left: but Hili smiled at Rosita whenever she saw her, and often crept unobserved into the caravan to settle its disorder or to leave some dainty that she knew Rosita loved.

But as the time passed she could not help realising, even while she was ashamed to admit the thought, what a relief it was to be free from the thraldom of those exacting and impredicable changes of mood.

She found, too, how much jollity and companionship existed among the circus-people. It was fun to listen to their stories in the long, hot, lazy afternoons; or to gather round the fire of an evening, when for some reason there was no performance, and crack jokes, along with the others, and hear their adventures in many countries, and the tales and customs of their homes, generally in some distant land; and talk about fairs and masques, and famous people, and music and dancing; and to

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join in the good-natured raillery that followed the recital of some conquest of the heart, always related with humour and lightness, taken and dismissed as a gay, natural thing ; and perhaps even to flirt a little, along with the other girls, with the handsome young trapezist, or the new lion-tamer, or even the cheerful, polite young men who stacked the benches in the wagons. She discovered now how much she had been cut off from those of her own age during the time of her enforced servitude to the World's Jockey. And above all, she discovered that exhilarating power both within her and in the world around her, that enchanting blossoming whose impulse she had felt before, and which she experienced now at last in a measure so full that it seemed to occupy the whole of life. Gladly, merrily she gave herself to it. The rapids of early womanhood rose round her, hurried her along : happy as a bubble, she was swept off her pretty little feet.

Though no longer under the Signorita's tutelary eye, though no longer obliged to do her necessary hours on the bars, or crack her instep so many hours each morning, or flex and stretch over the pommel with the extreme and unremitting rigour that her directress had enforced, she began to experience those ambitions of the ring that swing into the minds of all young and charming girls.

She began to vie with her companions in the exhibition of the tit-bits of her craft. To these an added relish was added. All the performances were henceforth enlivened, as it were, by the gossip to which she now had access. A knowledge of the great and noble patrons who might be watching the show, a highly coloured smattering of their histories, relationships, famous acts, victories, successes,—did not this lend a peculiar glamour of fame and success to one's own achievements, and give them zest and meaning ?

It became her ambition to pose on her pointes during the first two circles of the ring, and after performing her paces to circle again, executing an arabesque, and at the same time kissing her hand, as she passed below

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the box of the Duke Michael or the Prince Paul or who-ever it might be. She desired above all, most ardently, to dispense altogether with the leather drum, and to stand instead in her heel-less ballet-shoes, on the resined hind-quarters of the fat white mare.

This was an accomplishment which the Signorita had frequently told her it would take years of continuous practice to acquire: yet to her amazed and triumphant delight she had once or twice actually achieved it. The audiences were delighted, too: for at these times, while concentrating the whole of her weight on a bouncing surface the size of a pfennig, she was enabled to dispense in some mysterious way an air of fairy-like grace, innocence, and appeal.

Whether the Signorita was even aware of this triumph, Hili did not know. The lady went through her accustomed performance, she pursed her lips, and she said nothing.

And Senhor Lopez, too, said nothing. He looked on; he allowed it; he was pleased, of course, with the applause; but he looked grave and he scratched his chin. He was glad to see the crowd liked Mademoiselle Céleste and that she could pull out a pretty trick occasionally. Occasionally, however, is not an altogether satisfactory word where a reputation for expert performances is concerned. There was, in any case, another consideration too. A small, pretty child need only go through the simplest action to charm an audience: from a young woman, however engaging, something more highly skilled is required. And to be perfectly confident, from the Circus point of view, in the manœuvre he had just witnessed—that is, to be able to produce it reliably at all times, in all places, to begin and to cease it at the prescribed second, required more balance and muscular control—that is, more hard work and application—than the charming young lady (he began to realise) seemed willing or able to produce. Therefore he looked grave and watched in silence.

But Hili was unaware of all this. She found, indeed,

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that she could not keep up her remarkable success. For some ridiculous reason her ankles swelled and her back ached, and the last time her head had spun round so much that she had actually been in danger of falling to the ground. Disappointment naturally came to her when she discovered that these gems of horsemanship were beyond her reach : but with the gaiety of spirit that had now returned she resigned herself to this situation, and continued to jump on and off the drum borne by her placid mount, and to wear roses and to look adorable.

II

And at last she, too, began to have admirers : yes, even august ones, the silly girl. The ancient nobleman from Toulon greeted her Act with conspicuous attention. The Duke Michael, she declared, had smiled at her, oh, *most* kindly, when she had passed beneath him, raising the hoop of coloured paper flowers . . .

Of course this was nonsense : for, as everyone knew, had he not at that time the pretty little Tyrolesienne ? However, the fact was, that a few nights later, to the amazement of all beholders, a groom in red leggings, cockaded, and bearing on his chest an immense ducal crest, stood respectfully at her little tent-door, and shortly afterwards whirled her away in a smart green carriage with huge spidery wheels : and the next morning she returned, a little blown about, her pretty skin tight as a drum with good food and good wine, a charming ring on her finger, and a pocketful of gold coins to jingle. And, since she had wished it, as much of a maiden as before. Yes, that was how things were done in the days of the Duke Michael.

So that started her off. After that it was first one thing, then another. Supper here, a festa there. Amusements, happiness, pleasures, seemed to heap themselves, of their own accord, into her small hands. It was as if all the delights of a young girl's life that are generally spread over years, piled up now, glittering, into a heaven-kissing hill. Masques, fairs, excursions, seemed to crop

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up everywhere as they travelled : and to these some kind person or other always seemed to invite her. She generally caused these invitations to include some girl-friend chosen from her companions, and together they would set off, the two young things, radiant, eager to be amused.

Everybody liked her. She was so artless, so gay, so innocently good-natured. In spite of all her admirers she never aroused jealousies among the women, she was never the cause of even a single fight among the men. It was as if they knew, instinctively, that the only favours she gave were those happy ones that are light as air. The things of passion did not touch her life . there seemed to be no door in her soul by which they could enter. And it did not matter. Those who wanted that had plenty of other resources.

She did her pretty little act, she supped with any who asked her, she gave her smiles here and there : and she turned up again, fresh as ever, charming and willing to please. Nor did she forget, in all these months, her kindly and continuous visits to the Signorita's caravan.

Of course this could not go on for ever. Eating, drinking, smiling, laughing, singing, these are very well, very delightful no doubt . but they have one terrible sequel. They make you fat.

That is to say, not fat as the ordinary observer considers it. But at least not a sparse collection of straight shining bones, strung with taut muscles, covered sharply with skin, and wired by nerves as strong as steel, which is what the Circus requires of you.

The time arrived when it became evident that the beautiful Mademoiselle Céleste was expressing a little too much of youthful curves, was becoming already too much of a natural woman, too little of an athlete. Her audiences found no fault with her ; but to the trained eye of Lopez the signs were sadly unmistakable. Quite soon, any time now, she might begin to lose her agility : already, almost, he fancied she no longer jumped with quite the same effortless ease on to the broad plateau of

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her rosinback. Well, there it was, it was always the same : train them from the age of three and they could go on almost for ever ; start later than that and whatever success you may seem to gain, it may be—pouf !—all over in a few years ! The only strange thing was that Signorita Rosita, experienced as she was, had not recognised this, but had wasted so much time on her.

He had his troubles, Lopez. Rosita gave him trouble, for one thing. She sneered now openly at her former protégée. Every other day she told him her whole Act was a disgrace, that she could not endure to be on the same bill. “ Either she goes or I go, I’ve told you that before ! ” she flung at him continually. And she was quite capable of walking straight out, and taking her horses too, as she had threatened. Then there was always the fear of a fracas suddenly breaking out between her and the other. The last time it had been smoothed over and had died down : the next time it might be very different. One could not afford to have quarrels and fights among the performers, it always led to troubles, sometimes bloodshed, you never knew where it would end. And one couldn’t afford, either, to lose the Rosita ; whatever her age, whatever her changeable temperament might be, she remained an expert of the old school ; her performances were magnificent, always dependable, always minutely, carefully, exact.

Yes, it almost seemed as if the only possible course was to . . . And yet, one felt responsible, too, for the young girl. What had happened to that man, Perroguet ? No enquiries had ever been made ; as far as one knew he had never been heard of again. The girl had asked about him, often enough, in the beginning ; and one had, quite rightly, choked her off what had seemed a risky subject : and now, latterly, one had begun to ask her if *she* had heard anything ; but all she would say was to assure one very earnestly that one only had to wait and Perroguet would return. Well, in the circumstances, that did not help very much !

In this mood, Lopez was transfixed one day, in making

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a visit to Maria, relating to some costume he was displeased with, to hear the voice of Marie-Céleste singing within the tent. Untutored, but exquisitely clear, the notes came through the striped canvas. The melody of the song was unknown to him, but it bore a swinging burden that caught up the mind at once into its glancing curves, and at the same time it carried a feeling of direct human nearness, as if a heart were speaking aloud. It was an old ballad.

Lopez listened, his errand forgotten.

When the song was finished he felt as if he had dropped back to earth.

He did not intrude, but he sent Kranz later in the day to request Marie-Céleste to speak to him in the Business-shed.

"I did not know before, Mademoiselle," he began in his fussy manner, "that an agreeable voice was among your many charming possessions. Don't go, Kranz. Stay here. Sit down. I am hoping the young lady will oblige us with a song or two. Will you not, Mademoiselle? I overheard you this morning and I can truly say I was delightfully surprised."

Without any demur, Hili sang. In the same way that she had been able to draw, and to dance, she was able to sing: sweetly, spontaneously, though not stupendously.

Senhor Lopez was deeply impressed. On the flood of her notes he had an idea—an inspiration. Yes, a veritable inspiration. That would solve all troubles very neatly, and make him feel a philanthropist too, as well as a connoisseur of the arts.

He went away and saw a very particular friend of his.

As a result Hili shortly discovered that she could be, if she wished, engaged to sing for the whole summer in the little Concert-theatre of that town. It would mean, naturally, parting with the Circus. The Circus was in any case going on in a week or two. But lodgings would be found for her near the theatre. It would be good pay, a pleasant occupation, and one perhaps more suited to her than the equestrianism, which, after all, if the

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truth were told——! Lopez's hands were apologetic, explanatory. It was, perhaps, better, after all, not to mince matters: the fact was, her so-called Circus performances were already of very little use, and in a short while they would be quite worthless. But he didn't throw her out, as some owners would have done: no, no, not at all: he waited till he could give her this very good chance of getting another employment. One had to move on in this world, one had to move and change: this engagement would last definitely for several months, and when it was over, who knows? By that time something better still might easily have turned up.

With tears in her eyes Hili hesitated. To part with the Circus, which she and Perro had joined together, where she and Perro had lived together? That would seem almost like parting at last with him. But what could she do? There was no choice at all, really. Senhor Lopez was very nicely throwing her out.

She choked back her tears, and smiled, and said she was content.

Finally, she even became reconciled to the idea. Her immense faith in Perroguet overcame all scruples.

" You will tell him, Senhor," she said very seriously, " where I have gone. With the Theatre I shall be in the one town for some time. Perhaps it will even be better so, after all. You will tell him where to find me. I will give you the address of my lodgings, soon, before you leave. I will write to you wherever you are, so that you may know where I am."

" Certainly I will tell him. If I ever see him again," said Lopez. He heaved a great sigh of relief.

C H A P T E R X X I I

I

THUS Hili began her days of the Theatre.

The swift rearrangement of her life gave her little time for afterthoughts or regrets. She felt, indeed, as she fancied the pieces in the game of Chess must feel, who are removed firmly from one square into another unknown to them. She gazed with a timid yet happy interest at her new surroundings.

It seemed strange, at first, to waken in a little room with a wallpaper, and a real window, and a proper bed ; and to hear the carts rattling on the cobbles outside and the cries of the street-sellers ; and to sit at meals at a real table with a real tablecloth over it ; and, when one looked out, to see always the same tree, the very same branch of it, cutting across the same part of the window at the same angle ; and to know that below it, across the road, there remained always the same ancient curiosity shop, with the same yellow shutters.

The landlady of her lodgings was a kindly, garrulous old woman, chiefly interested in the welfare of her married sons and daughters. She told Hili the story of her own life, and of their lives, up to date, within the first few days, mingled with accounts of the incredibly astute sayings of the grandchildren. Between these biographical exertions she gave Hili breakfast, dinner, and a light supper after the theatre ; advised her continually about wrapping up against the cold, these treacherous evenings ; warned her never to speak to strange men in the town ; and generally took a proprietary interest in her.

She was particularly concerned in Hili's motherlessness, in her fatherlessness, in her queer, friendless, detached,

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uncared-for situation : for all these ills her panacea, frequently recommended, appeared to be *hot milk*, taken preferably at bed-time. Many glassfuls of this liquid Hili drank, weary, protesting, yet grateful, when she came in late from her last performance in the Concert-theatre. "Eh, eh, drink it up, the last drop," the landlady would say, eyeing her benevolently. "Yes, I know how to look after young people. Have I not six girls of my own? Good night now. Don't forget to close the window. Always remember, never go to bed with the window open. Night air is bad for the lungs. And you must take special care of your lungs—you, a singer!"

Before the chestnut-tree that crossed the window had budded fully its handsome pink spikes Hili had quite settled down into her new existence.

The little Theatre lay in the neighbouring street. She was obliged to attend there in the mornings, learn new songs, and rehearse any that required difficult instrumental accompaniment, or the combination of other voices. She possessed already, from Perroguet's teaching, some knowledge of the essentials of voice production, and a slight acquaintance with the classics : and she learnt popular songs easily. Her voice and ear were true, and her appearance charming as always. What more could be asked of a young woman singing for a few months in a little old provincial town ?

The director, Herr Hostig, friend of Lopez and true lover of music, was delighted with her.

The audiences were delighted, too. Consisting, for the most part, of exuberant youths from the University which had made the little place famous, they did not in any way cloak their opinions : when an item was disliked it was booed and hissed without mercy : one that found favour was brava'd, clapped at, stamped at, encored, and even joined in with extravagant enthusiasm.

Mademoiselle Céleste became an instant favourite : her songs were applauded to the echo. Young men of many nationalities crowded these performances, and in compliment to the visitors the programme was often divided

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into items in French, German or Spanish. A very pleasant cosmopolitan atmosphere existed thus on each side of the curtain.

Hili, on her side, was enthralled to hear the intimate gossip and chatter, the professional, careless trafficking in names of genius and power.

The company were at that time presenting scenes from *Der Freischutz*, that work of popular tunes and scenic adaptability. How enchanting to hear, one day, some one say, casually, lighting a cigar, or changing his coat . " Alas, my friend, do you not know, Herr Weber can now hardly get through his conductions ? Did you not hear he collapsed upon a sofa after his benefit concert . . . ? " —Or, perhaps, a discussion as to whether bowls, half filled with water, can truly be considered a musical instrument, and whether Gluck was justified in expressing his genius by this musical trick ; leading to an exhibition, then and there, of this elusive art, accompanied by the music written by Mozart himself to be played in this manner. . . . Or a repetition of Handel's now famous remark to the stage-struck English parson : " Go pack to your Church in de country. God may forgiff you for your pad singing : dese wicked people in London dey will neffer forgiff you ! " . . .

Yes, it was amusing to hear all this, to feel oneself at least on the fringe of these exalted references : and then to see Herr Hostig stroll in, huge and smiling, and complimenting everybody : and to know that in the evening, without any trouble, one would be able to please his patrons.

The Director had caused a string accompaniment to be composed to the ballad which Lopez had first heard her singing : this soon became a general favourite, chiefly because it had so many verses. The audience had plenty of chance of getting hold of the tune, and towards the end of it they would all join in. Then Herr Hostig would come to the front, beaming, declaring how much he appreciated their approval, feeling, however, that he

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must remind the honourable company that *they* had paid to hear the *artistes* singing, not the other way about ; and finally begging for special silence for the next item.

This was a triolet which was always a great success.

For this, the scene, which had consisted so far of no more than some black curtains arranged about a back-cloth representing street-life in Milan, was adjusted to a more complicated structure.

When the curtain parts now, it is to disclose a sylvan glade of trees, glimmering greener than in the first dawning of the world, their branches drooping in long strands of blossom, through which slants the bright impossible sunshine of Arcady. The hidden orchestra plays a melody of soft, single notes emerging from little cascades of fluttering sound : birds' voices whistle : trills mount on the brilliant air.

In a costume of cloud-like airiness Mademoiselle Céleste trips in. She sings. She will be true to her lover. Whatever befall, whatever harsh fate awaits, she will be true to her lover. From a cloth door opening in a cardboard cottage, on the left, the father emerges, an incredibly old man with a fantastic face, knobbly legs and a crooked stick which he shakes often, in anger. With the utmost severity he forbids the marriage : he is very cruel, his voice trembles with rage. Out of the forest on the right the lover appears, and in a long, heart-moving solo protests his wish to expire. Without listening to him for more than a few minutes, the father, on the left, continues to express his objections ; in the centre the maiden continues to declare her unswerving attachment ; and on the right, the lover to signify his imminent decease ; the whole culminating at last in a grand crescendo, fortissimo, and sostenuto, in which the three voices agree surprisingly, considering the variance of their postures and sentiments. At this juncture, by some means which is not clear, the obstacle to the union is removed from the father's mind : his face alters into a creased smile, he raises his crooked stick over the pair in blessing, and hobbles off through the cloth door. The

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lovers relieve their feelings in a formal dance of artless simplicity, linking hands, embracing mechanically, and springing gaily about the stage: and when at last the gallant goes off (presumably to make arrangements for the wedding), the maiden is left explaining, amid the renewed accompaniment of the birds, how they will all live happily for ever. Her fair pink face, haloed in golden curls, is suffused with an expression of gentle peace: her heart is mentioned several times, at each allusion to it her two small hands, flashing with rings, poise themselves delicately over her left breast, the finger-points turned inwards, just touching the white frills. The last notes, high and sweet and prolonged, find her in this position, her eyes fixed upwards. The applause is terrific. Hili relaxes, smiles, kisses her fingers to the air, and trips off. The trill of the birds' notes linger in the green canvas sunlight as the curtains close.

After this, she might have nothing to do for nearly an hour, except rest in the wings, or in the little dressing-room behind the stage, hearing the faint sounds of the rest of the programme and waiting for the time of her next appearance.

Whatever had gone on between, the last item was always the same.—A burst of measured drums, a steady, exhilarating beat with the brass, a pom-pom-*pom* flinging out a firm melody. These stirring sounds, with their martial under-current, caught up at once all the taints of lassitude that might have been spreading in the audience, they fixed, for the last moments, all ears, minds, nerves, on the same high pitch. Then the music softened, became no more than a background, the curtains parted. . . .

Hili again. She is dressed now in a white satin costume of the First Empire, caught high under the arms and falling to the ground in one unbroken, shimmering line: her hair is raised in knots and curls, with feathers mounting on it à la Joséphine.

Her face is serious. She holds out her arms, bare to the shoulder: her voice flutes proudly, bravely and

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tenderly above the suppressed vibration of the instrumentalists.

"Farewell, my gallant soldier of the Guard !
Fare-well !—Fare-well !
'Tis war alone can call you from my arms . . .
With my heart's love I give you up to France ! . . ."

The verses are short and soon over. The bugles take up the notes and echo them with a piercing and infinite sadness.

The young men, many of them far from home, some of them soon to die, and all of them bred on histories of gallant deeds, are fired with martial and romantic love, with images of home, of their mother's voices, walking in paved courts, among lavender, at eve. Their hearts swell with pride and fear of the future that may be theirs. They fix with adoration the slender, singing, white-satin figure that draws for them for ever the glory and sentiment of war.

For a moment only. Then the drums thunder again like the marching of a myriad conquering feet, the brasses utter triumphantly the swinging sounds of the basic tune, the whole audience is lifted off its feet and throngs out into the night humming and whistling the haunting rhythm.

These straightforward, romantic and adoring lads sent Hili notes. Could they dare to hope the divine lady would sup with them one night? Any time, whenever she liked best, any place? Or perhaps permit them to drive her in the Park for an hour or so some afternoon? Horses, carriages would be at her disposal. The nervous, impulsive devotion showed itself in every syllable.

Hili wept over these letters. She read them over and over, and kept them all in a little box in the corner of her room. Sometimes even, she answered them.

"I must try and look pretty," she would say to herself, dressing for a drive and pinning a curling feather in her bonnet; "I must try to be gracious and charming. Who knows what sad or perhaps lonely lives they may have had? And now, too, working so hard, and far from their loved people at home. And supposing there

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was suddenly another war—supposing one of them met with an accident—I might have been the last person he had talked to who was lovely and kind."

And she would be merry as a bird and benevolent as an angel all through the afternoon, and go away promising never to forget them, but on the contrary, to sing their favourite song that very night and make Herr Hostig say it was by Special Request.

And slowly the summer passed. The chestnut-tree blossomed and fruited: the hot milk, arriving regularly as ever, began to be more acceptable: and the succession of boyish faces flowed by in the same endless and happy stream.

"What a fool you are!" cried Mütter Porpoise, the old dresser at the theatre. "Mademoiselle Marie-Céleste, have you no sense? Have you no one to guide you? Heavens, child, have you never had *any* good advice? I see you frittering yourself away, day after day, with one person or another, like the silliest little fool in the world. Don't you know these lads can't do anything for you, really—only waste your time? At the most a supper, a few flowers, a drive in the Park for which they will give one month's pay. After that, no more! Pah! Why bother yourself with that? These boys aren't the only people here. What about the rich cork-merchant from Alicante? Haven't you noticed him looking at you? Or the old macaroni-manufacturer from Milan? Don't turn away. I know what I'm saying. Older, richer men, my dear, have more *behind them*. Solidity: yes, that's what's worth looking for. Apartments, clothes, diamonds. Ha, *they* don't fade like a silly bouquet or vanish like a box of sweets! And men, with good luck, with good management, they'd keep you for years. Perhaps pension you, even, at the end. And if you couldn't achieve that—after all, it isn't everybody can" (Mütter Porpoise laid a hand on her bosom and gave an immense sigh, swollen with vast, mysterious suggestions of past triumphs and unspeakably tender memories)—"then remember this: *stones!*

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Stones are small, easily carried, don't need looking after, and don't lose value. Have some pretty little sentimental prejudice." Mütter put her head on one side, examining Hili critically. "With your eyes, I should say sapphires. It's always a help if you can just mention a thing, definitely. And always make sure you get it—*first*. There, there, I'm talking to you just like my own daughter."

Mütter was given to breathlessness, her speech was often a little disjointed. But having once opened the subject she seemed unable to relinquish it. Hili's waits in the dressing-room between her appearances were made miserable now by this constant wagging tongue. Whenever they were alone she turned on her, heaping advice, leering, wheezing, and making suggestions.

Spectres that Hili had never perceived before were raised now in her mind. She stared at them, unable to grasp them, bewildered, revolted.

"And above all, above all," wheezed Mütter, "be warned by the example of Zapette, who danced in this theatre only last year, and was much admired by the Count. Ah, the Count, you should have seen him! Old, but not too old: a white button-hole always, a coin or two for everybody. Yes, yes, we all knew him: alas, he has left the town now. Well, this Zapette,—don't go away, I'm just coming to the point, you can't go through that door, Mademoiselle, it's locked, anyway, it leads to the stage—well, this silly Zapette, what do you think? I said to her, 'Get the diamonds first': but instead of allowing him to give her the diamonds, quite at the beginning, and then perhaps arranging to have a little indisposition, or an engagement elsewhere that would cause her to leave, she actually was thoughtless enough to permit him to present her instead with a little *de la Fontaine*. A regular squaller, too. And there she was. So remember Zapette, *that's all I say!*"

"Fontaine? Zapette? I'm afraid I don't understand," said Hili.

"Now, my dear, there's no need for all that, between you and me. I've lived in the world, I know what's what.

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After all, look at you. All those graceful curves. Don't stare so ridiculously. You're not a child, you know, only shamefully ignorant of how to behave. That's all. That's why I'm trying to help you."

"I do not think I require your help, thank you," said Hili, standing very straight and quivering.

"Well, well, perhaps not, in some ways nature's the best teacher, no doubt. But in other respects you do seem to have lacked guidance. Where is that man, Perra-something, that I've heard you say you used to go about with. Did *he* never teach you anything?"

Hili's eyes filled with tears. Above the fat, leering cheeks she saw the clean bronze of the loved face: the eyes were looking at her, smiling and steadfast.

"He-he, I'll wager at your age, and with that pretty face, he taught you a thing or two; oh, yes, I can easily imagine it. I've no doubt he was the first——"

Hili turned crimson. A feeling she had never known before swept through her. It was hate. She raised her hand as if to strike Mütter Porpoise dead.

A cry came echoing through the dressing-room.

"Mütt-ther! Por-or-poise! Where are you? You are late. You're wanted." The old woman picked up her cigar from the table and hobbled off, shaking her head and wheezing.

Hili was left, staring, like one lost, at the swinging door.

Her feelings confused her, they were so mixed and ragging, and filled with flooding memories. Yes, Perro had taught her something. She saw his head now, leaning against the wagon-wheel, with the bright starry sky behind it. "A clean heart, my darling, and a kind hand . . ."

She threw herself down beside the little table, shaking with a nameless fear. . . . "Oh, Perro, come back. What is happening to me? What are they doing to me? Come back. I want you. I want *somebody*."

But after this she could not give herself to happy, chance acquaintanceships with the same gaiety as before. Let-

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ters that arrived were not answered, nor flowers accepted, nor drives taken in the Park. How could one enjoy a drive knowing it had cost some young gentleman more than he could really afford ? Besides . . . perhaps, after all, they wanted something in return.

Yet Hili did give herself, nevertheless. Her natural function, like Perroquet's, lay in giving.

To all those who crowded the Concert-theatre that memorable summer she gave something they would keep all their lives—a memory of grace, and freshness, and romantic innocence, that henceforth would not only haunt their own spirit but lend in some way a deeper significance to the gracious visions of nature. To all these listeners something was added, that lay between things seen and things imagined, between sense and sentiment : so that in after years, without knowing whence, they were able to feel a double joy in earthly beauties. A clear morning sky : a sheep-bell tinkling over a drowsy field of deep green : a moonpath on a deep ocean : these would be lighted for ever with a happy and romantic radiance.

II

But the summer was almost over ; the season was nearing its end. Already the company was beginning to plan their new engagements, wondering if they would be taken on again for the winter season, or whether they would go on tour, or whether they would hibernate on their savings. A kind of sadness inevitably accompanied the contemplation of their breaking-up and of the possibility of lean months ahead.

The recent death of Weber still weighed a little on their spirits, due to the constant mournful references of the Director. A keen patriot, he regarded as a personal friend any one of his nation who had achieved distinction.

But a consolation awaited him : one which he related to his company with pride. A very dear friend, a very notable and distinguished compatriot, was about to arrive in the town ; to make a stay of at least a month, perhaps more.

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"Ach, my friends, you must meet him, Herr Stüben, a fine old German scholar. What learning, what gigantic erudition! Yes, yes, we were brought up together, it is years since we met, you can imagine my pleasure to see him again. His knowledge of history is such as to astound even the most learned, he's a regular authority on even the most obscure details, that is why, doubtless, he has held for so many years his position of tutor in this highly noble family. Now he comes here, on his travels, with his young gentleman, to see the world, to visit our famous University. Does he forget his old comrade, his old correspondent and compatriot? No, no. He writes to me at once, signifying his visit, and doing me the honour to invite me to dinner at the very best hotel!"

Hostig's delight was immense: he told all listeners of the treat in store for him, descanting on the value of ancient alliances and on the extent of his friend's historical knowledge.

The company, to tell the truth, soon found his enthusiasm tedious. There were still a few weeks to go of their engagement, and the daily programmes had to be kept up with the same care as before. If the Herr Direktor wanted to make a song-and-dance about the arrival of an old acquaintance, why did he not turn it into a stage-item and have done with it, and save them all the trouble of racking their brains for new pieces?—This was not quite fair, as the Director's interest in the performances had not flagged: but at the end of the season artistes' temperaments are apt to be a little touchy.

And when the meeting had actually taken place, when the famous dinner in the hotel had actually been eaten, Herr Hostig's triumphant reminiscences became heartier than ever. Yet at last even he could not fail to notice the pale look of wearied disgust that mantled his listeners' faces, as he moved from one to the other, between the last rehearsals.

And then, turning suddenly, one morning, he caught the eyes of Hili—pleased, interested, sympathetic. . . .

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"That settles it!" he cried in his strong voice, beaming, slapping his knee. "It is you who shall be invited to meet the learned historian when I give the return luncheon in my apartments!"

And thus, within a day or two, it came to pass. Dressed in her very best, her prettiest feather curling over the brim of her bonnet, her sprigged blue gown (the one with the rose-and-blue shoulder-cape) neatly hooked and smoothed and patted by her landlady, who realised the honour of the occasion, Hili set forth for her little journey to Herr Hostig's lodgings in South Street.

It was a fashionable quarter that she had never before visited: a little nervousness was inevitable, with some anxious hopes that her appearance would not do the kind Herr discredit before his distinguished friend.

She knocked on the door. A stout, pleasant woman opened it at once. Was Herr Hostig at home?—Oh, yes, he was expecting her. Would she come in? Would she take off her wrap?

The other guests had already arrived. The small room seemed quite crowded with them. True, most of its available space was occupied by a huge dinner-table laden with pastries, pies, fruit, bottles of wine. Herr Hostig, with a flushed and excited face, was in the act of drawing a cork as she entered. He looked up, straightened his back, and smiled genially.

"Zo! Here we are, now, complete. Mademoiselle Céleste, I am delighted to see you! Let me present to you, my friends, this young lady—a heart of gold, an artiste of true merit! An acquaintance of whom I am proud!" He waved the corkscrew, still bearing the cork, between them, delightedly. "Here is my very revered and excellent old friend, Herr Stüben. And here is the young gentleman he is conducting on his travels: Baron Siegfried von Ulm."

That was how she met him.

He bowed in the most correct, most formal manner, lowering the flash of his blue eyes, clicking his heels, and

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placing one hand at his side : there was a second, only, during which the light swept over the smooth gold of his crown, thus presented ; yet when he looked up the whole of life seemed to have rushed together into that moment of time, thrusting up such a storm of emotion that she could not speak for the tumult of her heart.

But there was little chance to speak.

The director of music and the learned historian seized the conversation and brandished it like a solid thing between them. Immense booming sentences, long words resembling heavy artillery crashed about above the younger heads.

The pleasant serving-woman came in with chickens, ducks, haunches of mutton, pickled cabbages, huge suet pastries enclosing meats, hams, fruits, dates and olives. A large pie, stuffed with pigeons, was flanked by a tower of eggs and barley. The good Rhenish wine (procured not without much trouble) flowed freely : the tall glasses were filled and emptied and filled again. A golden ale of particular excellence came after ; this was drunk alone, with reverence, and solemn exclamations. Then a sweet cake arrived, and almonds and sugared balls, and tiny dried fish peppered with nutmeg : and after this again a gigantic cheese, with a beautiful red rind, whose appearance suggested a harvest moon : then a further vintage followed, with *Prosit ! Prosit !* going across the table.

The afternoon sun beat ever more warmly into the room, its rays slanting ever more level. Long curling black pipes were produced triumphantly by the host, and soon the blue spirals of smoke added their mistiness to the golden haze. Long after the woman had removed the last of the dishes and plates, the glasses and pipes remained : and still the stupendous arguments rolled : they waxed, waned, gathered strength, and hurled themselves forwards, rumbling and echoing like thunder on a cloudless day.

Under the cover of this dialogue, that is, when he could make himself heard, the young stranger spoke to Hili. He had, indeed, hardly removed his eyes from her since she had entered.

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"Mademoiselle," he said, "forgive me. I did not entirely catch your name. May I hear it again?" He leant forward, his glance enthroned her.

She was still lost in the grip of a feeling of destiny, huge and irresistible ; she felt now as if fate itself looked at her with those blue and burning eyes. She groped in her mind for a minute, as if unaware that he had spoken, or of the meaning of his question, and then she brought out from the past, spurred by she knew not what impulse, the name that was bound with her deepest ties, the name she had uttered to no one.

"Hili."

What they spoke of again she could not tell ; they conversed, she knew. His direct gaze did not leave her : it lay between them like a steady beam on which they both advanced in joy towards each other : or like a road on which, passing a stranger, you suddenly discover in him an old friend.

The note of "old friend" was indeed sounded continuously throughout the afternoon by the two elders. Old hands were clasped, old memories revived ; the village that had shared their youth rose before them again, with all its inhabitants ; and when at last Herr Stüben rose to go, his eyes, brimming with smoke and sentiment, turned with benevolence upon the young lady, while he made his little formal speech.

"I cannot thank you enough, my kind Hostig, for this happy reunion, and for the delightful conversation, and for the majestic luncheon, which, I assure you, I, like you, most heartily appreciated : though to be sure our young couple did it little justice. Well, well, youth is blossom-time, blossom-time. I hope we may see more of the charming young lady during our visit to your pleasant town. To-morrow—let me see—were we not going to visit the places of historic interest? What could be more agreeable than to have the same company again, and afterwards a little meal at my hotel? Ach, yes, this has been indeed a memorable occasion!"

And Siegfried, bending over Hili's hand, told her

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without needing to put it into words : This is an occasion which I shall never forget.

They said farewell, the four of them, they arranged the next meeting, they parted. Hili trod on air as she went home, hardly conscious of the streets or houses : hardly conscious of the Theatre, where she sang her numbers as if one ear alone were listening, and that her own. She gave her notes into the air with a deep happiness of the spirit.

" Why, girl, what has happened to you ? " cried the old landlady, bearing the hot milk. " You look quite different. You look—crowned, like a young Queen. May I ask, ha-ha-ha, may I ask, has a young King come riding into the town ? "

" I think he has," said Hili.

CHAPTER XXIV

I

BLOSSOMS flower quickly when the sun and the moon and the winds are right. Crags, pinnacles, winding rivers, sunsets, moonlit glades are made for romantic meetings. Swifter than any moves the ship where destiny blows upon first and young love.

Within a fortnight of their meeting Siegfried had proposed to Hili in marriage : and she had accepted him.

But promises, even with the heart's will behind them, are easier given than the power to carry them out.

With the first declaration of the young gentleman's attachment and unalterable determination, a hideous consternation broke out in the heart of his tutor. He who had suggested, almost contrived, the charming companionship, was aghast at its consequence.

For to rivet the mind too firmly upon affairs of the past unfits men sometimes to deal with affairs of the present ; and Herr Stüben, with his eyes fixed on history, had been unable to perceive what was going on under his nose. This did not prevent him from being firm, very firm indeed, with his young gentleman ; from determining not to give the matter one moment's serious consideration ; and resolving, above all, not to allow his well-known sentimental tendencies to betray him.

" No, no," he said, starting firmly enough, " it is, you must see, quite impossible ! Think of the noble gentleman, your father ; think of the gracious lady, your mother ! They would never forgive me. No, no, without the express approval of their choice you can never marry. In any case—a foreigner, a singer, a young girl of no family ! You must be mad. Somebody met by chance,

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known only for a few days! Preposterous, you can see for yourself.—A lovely face, I admit, my dear boy. Yes, I know altogether how you feel. . . .”

But Siegfried was firm too and he was young, besides. The feeling that had taken him swept through him like a strong wind that scatters straws aside.

“ You have been kind to me, sir, for many years : I am grateful for your teaching and for your help and advice. But this, now, is my affair. You have had your life ; this is mine. I cannot allow you, or anyone, to interfere. Whatever she is, she is my choice : I will marry her and no other. My parents' objections will have to be overcome ; when I see them I shall explain to them that my happiness is set upon this marriage. You will, I hope, explain this to them also.”

“ I ? ” said Herr Stuben, terribly flustered. He saw himself the centre of an angry scene. “ Not I, I can assure you. I will have nothing to do with it. Put the whole matter out of your head. See, I will arrange at once for us to leave the town. Unfortunate, indeed, that we ever came here ! ”

But, more unfortunate still (for Herr Stüben), the very next day he was seized by the worst attack of gouty pains ever experienced. Whether this was brought on by the vinous excesses inseparable from meeting old friends (he had long been forbidden any indulgence by his doctor) or from standing about too long in the damp, looking at ruins, it was impossible to say. He lay on his bed groaning and uttering prohibitions.

Siegfried strode like one demented up and down his room, torn between his respectful duty to his parents and a sudden, impending foreboding of frustration and loss. In the evening he went to see Hili.

“ Hili, my dearest, my beloved ; you know I love you.”

“ Yes.”

“ And you love me.”

“ Yes.”

“ You know we must be married.”

“ Yes.”

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"We must be married quick, at once, before anyone can stop us!"

"Yes."

As soft as that word, so gently repeated, whispered the breeze, coming out of the dark sky, carrying before it the first of the dead leaves. The chestnut-tree shook its branches, the black-withered clusters dropped to the ground.

"Then leave it to me. I will see the priest, the pastor, someone. Say only you love me, that is all I care for. When we are married no one can part us."

II

So Hili was married, on a pearly September morning, in the little church on the hill with the red steeple.

She wore her blue dress with the shoulder-cape, and she carried her little crucifix. It was so early that no onlookers were present. The two came out hand-in-hand, like children, and Hili looked up into the face of her husband, and into the morning sky. A lilac-pink sun, caught in a faint web of mist, suffused above them a film of shimmering gold. And somewhere up there Perro's face smiled on the union. Dear, darling Perro: how happy, how proud he would be that his words had come true after all. . . .

But now, of course, after this, they had to break the news to Herr Stüben.

From his bed of pain the historian raged, and thundered, and threatened.

But what can one do with a fait accompli? Much as one may deplore it, it has already become an historical fact! He was racked with anxiety, dread of his employer, and the weight of his own responsibility. He expressed a thousand times his fears of the terrible consequences into which this hasty act might plunge them all. How could he ever appease the noble parents? They were so proud, so rigid, they might disinherit Siegfried, who knows what? They were as stubborn as iron. Yes, a nice, pretty kettle of trouble was brewing. Here he would be taken short with a screw of pain.

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All his fulminations passed over the heads of the young pair. They smiled at him as sweetly as a couple of cherubs out of a hymn-book, they enquired solicitously after his ailments, expressing their only desire to be his speedy recovery. Seeing their kind, polite faces, and the rapture that lighted them, what could he do but relax a little in return? It would have been easy for him to allow his well-known weakness to get the better of him altogether, but that loyalty to his employers forbade it.

Meanwhile, the time passed; for the lovers very delightfully.

Hili was enchanted with the luxuries of the hotel, to her a wholly new world: Siegfried was lost in a dream of almost immortal happiness. They had no ties, no regrets: the theatre-engagement was long since terminated, they had nothing to do but enjoy themselves and each other.

Still, the time was passing: and the news had not yet been made known at home.

Herr Stüben grew ever more anxious and undecided. Truth to say, he was afraid to divulge it: from day to day he waited, hoping that, by some means, something would happen which would make it easier for him to write that momentous letter. These things must be done carefully, wisely. . . . What a calamitous business! The only course now was to see that it did not become more so. It was all he could do to prevent the ardent Siegfried from writing himself, and flinging out the news in a manner that would certainly not draw forgiveness for his folly.

The weather changed, the first of the winter cold came on, and still they could not tear themselves away from the old town.

Herr Stüben firmly declined to return home without his charge, and face the ordeal of breaking the news by himself: Siegfried refused to leave his bride: yet to take her back with them and present her, then and there, was clearly not a diplomatic approach. It might antagonise

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the old couple too sharply. Even Siegfried, who urged this course, saw at last the unwisdom of it. They discussed the matter from all sides and still no solution presented.

The winter frosts bound the earth, fires sparkled brightly on every hearth. The festival of Christmas came ; and went : bringing to that ancient Nativity a knowledge of the divine power of creation, handed still, like a torch, to human bodies. A transporting joy, surpassing anything they yet had known, suffused the two at this stupendous revelation.

Herr Stüben himself, even, had by now almost forgotten his anxieties : at least, he had allowed them to be overlaid. The town abounded in unrivalled opportunities for historical research : he was once more happily absorbed.

And thus things might have continued indefinitely (until supplies ran out), but that one morning Stüben received, like a thunderbolt, a packet from the noble Baron himself. The young gentleman's mother was ill : she desired his presence : would Stuben make arrangements for an immediate return ? He enclosed sufficient money for the first part of the journey : more would await them with the bankers at Metz.

Here was fresh matter for consternation.

" We must go at once, Herr Siegfried ! Can you not see that ? Your mother is ill." The full measure of his delay and responsibility broke dreadfully upon the distracted historian.

But now Siegfried raged. He refused, in any circumstances, to leave his wife ; especially now. He said he cared not if he never saw his parents again.

" But this is an order. It must be obeyed."

" Very well. Then I will take her too."

" But we have been over that so often ! And now that the gracious lady is ill, it is more impossible than ever, the shock of such news would be greater, even, than before. Besides, now . . . in any case . . . travel for her, is it wise ? Journeys are long and fatiguing at this time of year, and the roads of this country are dangerous.

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Everyone knows this is the very worst time for travelling ! Even the most terrible winter storms are less treacherous among these hills than the rains of the spring. Wasn't it only last week, that landslide, when the coach was overset ? Such risks are not for her, at this time, you can see.—No, no, she must stay here."

"Very good. Then I will stay too."

In this impasse Stüben appealed at last to Marie-Céleste. Her eyes opened gravely as she listened to his arguments.

"See, his gracious mother is ill, perhaps dying ! How will she feel when she knows her son will not come to her ? How will she pass the days hoping in vain for his return ? He, the only child, the heir, one could understand her sorrow ! . . . How could he, too, ever forgive himself if he was not beside her, to take her hand, if it came to that, at the last ? "

This decided it. To his entreaties, Hili henceforth added her own. He must go, at once, there was no question at all ! She would be quite happy, she would miss him terribly, he would be glad to feel he was doing what was right, it would be only a short time—only a month or two, before he returned. And their love would not suffer. They would write, every day.

Thus, on her firmest words, on her sweetest smiles, on her brightest, most coaxing ways, she sent him from her. On a cold early morning, pouring with rain, they parted.

"Hili my dearest, my sole love, this is the only reason I could have left you ! Think of me always. I shall be true to you for ever." His eyes blazed with his unspoken feelings : his face was drawn with sleeplessness and anxiety.

Hili smiled gaily. She tossed out her curls. "Of course, Siegfried. Siegfried darling, I know that. Come, smile. Think only of happiness and our glad meeting. Think only of your mother, so pleased at your return."

She waved her handkerchief till the tears dimmed him. The coach rolled away.

Very cold and formidable the hotel looked when she

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returned. The rooms they had shared were large and oppressively ornamented—she had not noticed it before. At the same time they were empty, and hard; like the skull of a bird she had picked up long ago, with Perro.

Why had she thought of Perro again, so suddenly, so piercingly? In all these happy months she had not thought of him—his image had lain at peace in the depths of her mind. Now, suddenly, he was there again, with the memory of old days, as if her life unrolled itself . . . Yes, the past was all one could know; the future's only light was hope.

Well, one must cling to hope; hope brought good things, somehow, of its own accord. And there was so much to hope for, to pray for, to will to happen!—That the illness of the noble lady might be slight, and soon over: that Herr Stüben might not have any more aches from the stiff, draughty coach: that he might not find it difficult to tell what he must: that the honoured parents of Siegfried might look with compassion upon his headstrong marriage: that they might extend, even to her, in the end, a little affection, if she were dutiful, obedient, humble: that they might love her child, the grandson: that Siegfried—here her thoughts dissolved into a golden mist in which hung a lilac-pink sun, less bright than his blue eyes.

Eagerly she awaited his first letter. He had promised to write at once, by the first courier, from the first stopping-place. A day there, say, and a day back. That would be two days before she could hear. He could have no news, but he would tell her he loved her, she would know he was happy and safe. After that the times would be longer between his letters, as he travelled farther and farther away. . . .

This letter that she would receive from him, the first between them, became a thing she looked for hourly. "Has the courier passed yet?" she wanted to enquire every moment of the servants in the hotel. But she could not. She could not bring herself to speak to them or any other person. She knew no one in the place: she

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had not wished to when Siegfried and Herr Stüben had been with her ; now, without their support, the whole establishment seemed overwhelming, impersonal, remote.

When three days had passed, and then four, and she still had received no news, she grew anxious. The fourth day was interminable ; still heavily clouded and still pouring with rain. ‘To-morrow,’ she thought evenly, ‘I shall certainly have his letter : it must have been delayed through the bad state of the roads.’

But the morrow came and brought nothing ; when a week had passed, she became tormented with waiting. Suddenly she hated the hotel, she could not bear this huge, dark, ornate building any longer, the heavy stale smells of food revolted her. She would rush out—go !—But where ? There was nowhere. Besides, Siegfried had bidden her stay there until his return : he had arranged with the hotel-keeper to send more money from Metz. Yet she could sit still no more, waiting for news that never came ! Movement ! Movement was the only thing to clear sick fears from the mind—

She slipped on a warm wrap and set out to walk in the Park. A brisk walk would soon make everything seem different.

The rain had stopped for a little : but the sky was still spread with dark clouds, against which the trees’ bare branches stood wet and glistening, scattering their rain-drops on the cold sweep of the wind. How strange to remember that this was the Park where she had driven in the golden days of last summer, so long ago. So much had happened since then. Then she had been a child, pleased with any toy. Now life had shown her its true riches, had heaped her future with happiness and promise. . . .

Just as she stepped from the pathway to cross the road towards the Park a newsboy on horseback came clattering over the cobbles from the direction of the city gates. In two large satchels on either side of the saddle he carried the printed sheets that bore news. Pleased to indicate their piquancy, according to his trade, he bawled the

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gems as he came along. His voice, mingled with his horse's clatter, at first no more than a staccato sound, developed words and meaning as he approached: it turned into a roar that froze the heart's blood in its channels, it turned into a roar that blotted out heaven and earth.

"Mail-coach disaster! Last week's mail-coach overwhelmed! Worst landslide for years! Carriage discovered at foot of abyss! No survivors, no survivors! Read the names, read the names and all details! Bodies horribly mutilated. Horribly mut-i-lated! Mai—l-coach disaster!—Here you are, sir, thank you, sir, four sheets, all guaranteed true—Hi, someone pick up the young lady! There's a young lady just there by the railings, fainted."

III

There is a limit to the degree in which a mind can feel pain; beyond that pitch the stunned senses refuse it.

During the days in which Hili lay recovering from the injuries of her fall, it seemed to her the presence of Siegfried was beside her continually, bidding her take heart, speaking of his love, consoling her for his loss. While as yet she had little strength to bear it, the full measure of her sorrow was veiled: only as she regained her forces, little by little, as week succeeded week, she came to realise increasingly the extent of her hurt.

The people of the hotel were kind, and saw she had all she might need; yet their attitude gradually altered. The wife of a rich young foreigner was one thing: the widow a rather more problematical matter. The proprietor, with the kindest of smiles, was nevertheless attentive to see that his weekly bills were promptly paid.

For herself she could have wished to die too. But there was now another to consider. As the sharpness of her trouble fused itself with the general fabric of her mind, and instead of hurting, minute after minute, allowed her a few intervals of repose, she forced herself to take stock of her present position.

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It was serious.

Before the winter was over the money she had been left would be exhausted. It was essential for her to find some means of renewing it. The life for which she was responsible depended solely upon her. She must find work, earn money while she could, have something ready with which to welcome it.

First, cheaper lodgings must be procured. The hotel was far too expensive. Now she could walk again she must bestir herself. For the last time she paid the hotel bill. The proprietor looked his enquiry, but he said nothing. She went away proudly, with her few belongings, and established herself in a small room in a back street.

For money must be saved. Yet every day's living seemed to cost too much. However little she ate the money sank and sank.

She went about everywhere looking for work: alas, there seemed to be little she was fitted now to do. Could she sing, perhaps—a short engagement? She went to see the Concert Director, Herr Hostig, in the hope that he could advise her.

He was away. The woman who had served at the luncheon-party looked less pleasant now than on that "memorable occasion". Leaning against the door-post, picking her teeth, she regarded Hili with a brutal curiosity. Hili could not bear her look, and feared her inquisitive questions.

Suddenly she realised there was no one in the town whom she knew, or could go to. All those cheerful young men who had thronged the theatre, who had seemed to surround her with friendliness and companionship—not one had she known, deeply, as an intimate. Nor could she apply to them, in any case. She thought of the priest who had married her—a gentle, clerky, poor man: no, she could not beg help from him.

She went to see her old landlady at the other end of the town, in the lodgings where she had first been. The good woman came to the door but did not invite her within.

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It was clear her interest had subsided since the days of the hot milk, or had been ousted by another.

"Well, there now, I haven't seen you this long time, not since you were married. Eh, we've had troubles enough since you left. First, my eldest daughter had a bad knee and couldn't get about and I had to do her house for her, and then the second one's husband lost his work and you know what *that* means, they hadn't enough to feed the children—I've had three of them here for five months now, and I can tell you I've been hard put to it myself ; but at last, we were just getting on better, when, what do you think, they've all come out all over in scarlet spots. They're very bad, the doctor says they'll be weeks. Eh, yes, it's a world of trouble. And they're disappointed too, the brats ; I'd promised to take them to the Circus, to make up for these bad times."

"The Circus ?" said Hili faintly.

"Yes, Cirque Lopez, same as came last year. Haven't you seen the Bills ? Well, you're a grand lady now, I suppose. I hope your husband continues in good health ?"

Hili turned away. How could she heap her own troubles on this kindly, impersonal head ? But the words *Cirque Lopez* began to shine in her mind.

It was strange to find he could look just the same as ever. The year that had passed, bringing so much to her, could it have failed to alter the rest of the world ? Yet Senhor Lopez was exactly as small, brown, compact as before, with even that old fussy, generous, quick-tempered expression in his eyes.

She had married, she told him, she had lost her husband, she was going to have a child. She had no one in the world to turn to. She would be happy to work for him again in the Circus.

The Senhor's face rounded in surprise. He looked at her with amazement. It seemed no time since he was turning her over to Hostig, glad to be rid of her, feeling he had done her a good turn. And she, too,—happy,

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bright, gay as a flower. What could have happened ? She looked shockingly pale ; and worn, as if she had been through something inexpressible. Yet there was a pride in her bearing that was new : and under the bright curls that he remembered so well the delicate face was resolute.

" But this is dreadful, unheard-of ! What about your husband's people, will not they look after you ? "

" No, I am afraid not."

H'm. That was awkward. He dared not question that clear, unflinching gaze. Still . . . have her back ?—That needed thinking over. Pursing his lips, he pondered. . . .

Even in the short time since she had left them there had been changes in the Circus. Rosita had gone, for one thing. That disdainful lady had flounced off, after all. It was owing to something Gaugin had said, some silly gossip, no one really knew what : but the circus-people had laughed about it, and she had been furious, and after a terrible scene in which he, too, had taken part, off she had gone, that very day. So that altered things a bit. . . . Yes, the Circus changed always ! He looked up. Old Maria came hobbling across the grass.

She, also, was becoming a trouble, her eyesight was failing, her stitches were dreadful, the colours didn't match, there were always complaints. And now she herself had begun to complain loudest of all, saying she was too old to go on being dragged about the world. . . .

" I would do anything, anything, Senhor," the quiet voice was saying before him.

" But, my dear Marie-Céleste, what *can* you do ? "

Hili had seen the ancient figure, too. " I could help Maria," she cried eagerly. " I sew very well. I did it before."

" You could take the place of Maria, if it comes to that ! Yes, that settles it. We'll have it so." He came up and put his little hand on her shoulder. A smile lighted at last his fussy brown eyes.

" And don't be anxious, my dear child : I'll see you're looked after, when the time comes."

P A R T I I I

H A N S

C H A P T E R X X V

I

HANS was born in the summer of the following year.
His appearance in the world was in itself a triumph.

"They cannot both live," said old Nissa, the nurse from the town, hastily summoned. "It will be either she or the child." And Hili had heard her and had turned her face to the tent-wall and had summoned all her strength to defeat the cruel prophecy. But in spite of her wish, in which the child was born already, radiant and handsome, for a week she had lain within the tent, a mother, yet not yet a mother. When labour thus proved vain, old Nissa intervened. "Not me: the babe," Hili had said with what might well have been her last breath. . . . To give her last breath, to join Siegfried, would not that be better? Would not that be comfortable and sweet? . . .

"Bear a little longer, girl," said old Nissa's voice coming out of a dim green cloud, "you may have it, perhaps, after all." And there, in the end, triumphantly, it was. Its head was a little misshapen, that was all. Otherwise, though small, it appeared normal enough. "Eh, well, you can't tell at first," said Nissa, seeming to have regained her pessimism with the removal of its cause; "with these cases you often can't tell till the third or fourth year. Even sometimes when they learn to speak all right they don't get on properly afterwards. Well, at least it is *alive*," she said, pocketing her fee. "And so are you."

Appearing thus in the world between one circus performance and the next the infant could truly be called a Child of the Sawdust. Everyone was interested in this

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fatherless baby ; between them the women of the company helped to tend him, to care for the mother, and to carry out the many duties of the sewing-woman while she regained her strength. Hili had no more to do than to lie looking gratefully at everyone, and to cherish her new possession.

His soft, fair hair was like silk, it covered with a golden down the skull wherein the pulse could still be seen beating steadily ; his eyes, which held no expression, were the colour of the sky. In his small body all doubts were cancelled, it held the answer to the Universe. At last even Siegfried returned, bringing comfort in the hands of his gift.

Yet the child was more than the loved son of Hili and Siegfried : deeply the knowledge of what he was burned into her mind as the weeks passed, and her strength returned, and she took up again the threads of life. Tiny as he was, and helpless, he was the only surviving heir to the barony. The knowledge of her difficult but necessary duty weighed increasingly upon her. It was a duty, that was certain : but the very thought of what it might bring about was a torture almost beyond enduring.

Sitting in her tent repairing a torn piece of canvas, she forced her mind to face it, she forced herself to fix a time when it should be performed, as if this tying down of her act beforehand would tame it, make it unable to escape. The canvas was from one of the walls of the main tent : some seats had collapsed, the splintered planking had torn through the material. The rent was long and its edges were jagged, they had to be cut away and a new piece of material inserted. The canvas was thick, stiff, heavy ; even a needle of five inches bearing twine could go through it only under direct pressure : up, down. "When this is done !" she said to herself, satisfying her conscience in the promise. Yet before it was finished another task, more urgent, came hurrying along : one of the elephants, in getting up, had put his foot on his trappings, the yellow silk was torn right across : could it be sewn up at once and without showing ? It was

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wanted as soon as possible.—“Yes, of course,” said Hili, and to cover the join, she would sew some beads over it, in a pattern, to match the rest. She threw herself eagerly into this work; it seemed like a reprieve. Yet it was done, and the canvas-wall was done, ere she could bring herself to the deed. Pieces of work poured in continually, it seemed as if the whole Circus was breaking apart like a china bowl. “When this is done!—when this is done!” said Hili, trembling and anguished.

For she feared, when they knew, they would take the babe from her. She could not bear the thought of losing him; yet how could she deprive him of his birthright? Before, she had not realised it; before, she had not turned to them for help when it seemed needed for herself alone: now, seeing the living creation, the son of Siegfried, the matter was clear. Even if she lost him, he must have what was his own.

Yet perhaps, after all, those stern parents-in-law would let her still be near him, as a servant, maybe, she would not mind how humble her state. Oh, with what feelings would she face those indomitable wills, of which she had heard so much, and which she had so shrunk from meeting, even with Siegfried at her side to give her courage?

At last one day she drew her writings materials together. (Gaugin, the old groom, had kindly bought her quill and wafer from a booth in the fair.) Again she hesitated, the pen at her lips, her eyes on the fair head sleeping at peace in the cradle. Images from the past swept before her: the yellow walls of the convent, the grey faces of the nuns, the sheets of white paper, blotted and smudged with inky fingers ere yet a word was written, the hushed, tired air of concentration, the sighs of petulance from the unwilling children, Sister’s voice saying, “Now write: ‘the lit-tle ta-ble——’”; and outside, where longing eyes travelled, the brilliant greens, full of bird-song. . . . Dear Sister Auguste! you who were so patient, is it too late, now, to thank you for all your kindness when I was a child, too selfish, too stupid, to understand? . . .

She began her letter. “*Cirque Lopez.*” She gave

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the name of the town and country. That was easy. The rest was easy, too, after a few moments.

"Respected and honoured Madam, and gracious lady, the Baroness von Ulm. . . ." She had the honour and the sad duty to inform the gracious lady of the matrimonial alliance. . . . She, as the widow, would not have intruded upon the sorrows of a mother, in grief over the sudden, terrible loss of a loved and only son . . . but she, the writer, was by the mercy of Heaven become a mother herself lately, that was the sole object of this dutiful and humble epistle. . . . There was a little boy, the son of Siegfried, now by his father's death sole descendant of the House of Ulm. . . . She felt sure the gracious lady would welcome this news . . . would be glad to know a being survived of her dear son . . . might soften the loss . . . a grandchild . . . a beautiful boy, resembling his father in hair and eyes. . . . The baroness would be pleased with him. . . . She, the writer, only begged, with a renewal of her respectful duty, to be told what the gracious lady's wishes would be in respect to this child, Hans Siegfried von Ulm. . . . She could hardly dare hope they would extend to her, also, some measure of their affection. . . . Yet, however hasty and imprudent the act, on her son's part, to marry a poor girl, no one could have loved him more truly, or would honour his memory with greater—

Here Hili broke down. The formal sentences, expressing indeed her heart's thought, seemed to emphasise in their cold, arranged order the wild grief which she had suffered. For a moment she gave herself up to the wave of anguish that arose, obliterating everything. A sudden whimper came from the cradle. That stiffened her. As the child had his needs, so the child had his rights. She ended the letter hurriedly—a slight account of herself, of her marriage, of the kindness of Herr Stüben. She signed herself, in all obedience, her devoted servant and humble daughter-in-law, Marie-Céleste von Ulm.

When this letter was sent off, when the die was cast, she felt happier and at the same time wretchedly miser-

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able. Each small task done for the child became now a sacrament : for might it not be for the last time ? She must remember every detail about him—the way he looked, moved, fed ; the time when he fell out of the cradle but did not cry ; the time when first, at a fortnight old, he sneezed. These tiny miracles must be stored for ever in her heart, so that when she was alone she would be able to find them again.

Some slight knowledge of her circumstances was known to the circus-folk : with what greed would they have devoured the whole story ! But Hili shrank from their curiosity, even while she knew their sympathy would have followed it. Time enough to find some story to give them when her child was taken from her. And besides, there was always the chance that she might be required to go, too. That would be good-bye for ever to circus-land, with its mixed troubles and pleasures. With anxiety she saw the new life opening before her—a grey and stern vista of days in the bleak northern home, no laughter, no beauty, little happiness, only formalities, traditions, duties : her prayer was that she should prove fitted for this, and perhaps in the end, after many years, bring comfort, with her boy, to that aged and lonely couple.

And thus she waited for the answer to her letter. And when the weeks passed, and nothing was heard, she said to herself happily : “ Naturally, they are taking time to decide. It is not a small thing for them to discover they have a grandchild. They are making arrangements for his reception, his removal from here. Perhaps, even, they are sending someone all the way to fetch him ! What a good thing I left behind, with the Mayor’s clerk, all the directions of the circus-route. Even if they take months to follow him they will still be able to find him.”

But when the weeks did turn into months a frantic anxiety began to assail her. Was it her fate to wait always for a letter that did not come ? The dreadful reason of the last letter’s not coming shadowed her thoughts continually. Like the landslide that had engulfed, without warning, the two travellers, so ominous,

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so weighty, seemed the silence that grew in significance with each day's waiting. Could some terrible catastrophe have wiped out at one blow the House of Ulm ? The days that had seemed at first like drops of happiness, snatched from a receding tide, became now agents to her doubts and fears.

Then, one day, when the limit seemed to have been reached in mental endurance, there was a bustle on the circus-plot. The post had ridden out from the neighbouring town to deliver in person an important-looking letter. It was brought to Hili's tent. There it was, a very large yellow envelope, heavily franked, sealed with the crimson baronial seal, two crossed swords with a raven over the coronet. The writing was heavy and dark : "To Mlle Marie-Céleste" ; but Hili's eyes were too dimmed with grateful tears to read it.

Everyone came out from their tents to observe this interesting affair. Girls came laughing from the pad-room, from the dressing-tents, clustering round Hili, shaking out their dark curls, exchanging jests with the horseman. "Eh, indeed, isn't it a pity we cannot all have noblemen for our fathers-in-law. There'd be a many more babies born in the world if that could be arranged ! But some have always the luck, though they do little to deserve it. Come now, tell us : is it to be a castle and a hundred servants and a coach-and-four to take you hence ? "

Hili could not bear their cheerful interest that was witness to the moment that would part her from her babe. She entered the tent with the letter and she put it on the little table. Then she went to the cradle and looked at Hans. He lay, not asleep, but looking upwards, without expression, and quite happy. 'At least he will know nothing, he will not miss me,' she thought. The comfort it brought was underlined with a bitter pain.

She opened the great seal and began to read, with some difficulty, the stiffly-upright German hand.

" . . . After much and due consideration we have decided to reply to your communication in the hope that

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our letter may reach you in your wanderings with the Circus that you mention. . . . It is hardly, we suppose, necessary to say that we do not recognise any connection contracted by our dear son while on his travels abroad, even were it upheld by greater evidence than appears to be provided. . . . We cannot believe that our dear son could have committed such a grave error as to marry a young woman of the position you describe. . . . Such an alliance would have been altogether impossible to him. . . . We regret that we cannot place any confidence in your assertion as to the ceremony . . . had such an event taken place at the time you appear to state, information would undoubtedly have been conveyed to us by our trusted and worthy friend and servant, Herr Stuben. . . . Alas, both he and our dear son are no longer alive to refute a calumnious and impertinent suggestion. . . . The memory of our dear son is sacred to us, his life was upright and honourable and he possessed a knowledge of his duty to his great family . . . we write, therefore, for this sole purpose, that we deem it wise to put down for ever this mischievous and contemptible lie, to which we will never give ear or credence, but will ever oppose with all the strength of our power. . . ."

That was all. Not a word about the boy.

Mechanically, as if there was now no more room for thought in her head where anxious and tormenting thoughts had reigned for so long, she folded up the parchment and put it back into its envelope. Then her eye fell on its title, seeing for the first time its meaning—*Mlle Marie-Céleste*. Never give ear or credence . . . Oppose for ever with all our strength . . .

All at once she felt herself confronted with an inexorable will, blinding itself to daylight, refusing to admit any facts that were not welcome or commanded. Stubborn as iron, Stüben had said. Like a pillar of granite this opposing will rose in her mind while its cold mass seemed to fill the whole tent. For a long time she sat there, the letter in her hand. A gay girl's voice floated in through the fluttering canvas. The crowd was still outside,

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chatting and laughing. Hili rose and went to the tent-door, and put one hand on the rope to help her to stand erect. "Thank you for bringing me my letter," she said evenly. "There is no answer." The look on her face chilled the gay talk, the group stared in silence, non-plussed and disturbed; it broke up and turned away. The horseman gave his professional salute, wheeled his mount, and began to move off, picking his way carefully between the ropes and pegs and impediments of the fair-ground.

And Hili turned back into the tent. Hans was there: he had not stirred, he still looked upwards into the air.

She picked him up and pressed him to her heart. It was filled with anger, rage, humiliation, disappointment, and a deep, inexpressible joy. "*I shall be your mother and your father and your family, and the Circus shall be your Castle, my little son!*"

The child looked at her vacantly out of its blue expressionless eyes.

II

So Hans grew up in the Circus. Child of the sawdust, born with its breath in his nostrils, its sounds in his ears, he was absorbed at once by the huge machine: inarticulate and almost motionless, he became as much a part of it as one of the wooden pegs that held a tent-rope, whose existence was known, but unnoticed.

He slept on a rug in the tent with Hili. She placed every night a basin of water at his head, and hung above this her little crucifix, as the nuns had taught her to do, thus keeping away from him evil spirits while he slept.

She smiled, seeing herself do this. 'When one is young,' she thought (she was then twenty-two), 'one questions and argues, one asks Why? to everything, and even after that, perhaps, one rejects the answer: when one is older one listens and learns and humbly remembers. Yes, one doesn't dare take any risks.'

Content with her precautions and with his bodily prog-

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ress, she gave herself to her work. When he was not with her she knew he was in the circus-ground, where no one would harm him. He was never in mischief, he never annoyed others or was scolded, he was always quietly happy. When it was bed-time she would go out and look for him, and there he would be, gazing absorbed at some daily spectacle, his thumb in his mouth. When she picked him up, or told him to run along beside her, there was never any outcry as with other children, or show of will or temper.

This gave her peace in her heart, thinking her child contented : but after a while she was troubled to find he did not learn to speak as other children do. At the age of three he could hardly say a word. She began to teach him, every night, in the tent, spurred by some dim memory of her own. She taught him German, of course, the circus-tongue. With immense effort and patience she induced him to utter a sound or two, a few words, a sentence : but to any save herself it was unintelligible. 'He is, no doubt, one of those children who develop late,' she thought. 'He feeds well, at least, and sleeps soundly : and he is happy all day long.'

So Hans played in the sawdust, growing in health and strength, travelling from place to place, resting and moving on as decreed by the Circus fate. He was not old enough, of course, to appreciate the skill of the various Acts, but from the very first, as soon as he could toddle, it was noticeable how deeply he attached his interest to the Circus animals. This small figure with the blue grave eyes was familiar to all the animal-trainers, who showed him an instinctive fondness, as if he, too, was one of their pets ; and who allowed him liberties they would have denied to others. Hans, too, though he could hardly speak, seemed to express a special kinship with the other inarticulate creatures. Even their performances he appeared to understand better than those of the highly-paid artistes : as for their daily antics, their pleasures and discomfitures, he seemed to comprehend these more clearly than anything else in his world.

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Lopez's Circus contained at this time a great many animal Acts. In place of the absconding Rosita, the erst Jockey der Welt, he had acquired sixteen horses, no less, who, though not quite of the standard of the unique Alfonzo, were pretty skilful, nevertheless, and trained to such a pitch that if one strayed from his place in the quadrille, or whatever it was, the others would promptly kick him back into it. It made a fine, heartening show to see them thus, all acting in unison ; it helped to recompense Lopez for the loss of the lady. The incident of her departure had taught him something else, too : henceforth he insisted on owning, himself, all the animals under his canvas. That is, he insisted on paying a sum down for them on their arrival, which sum would have to be returned before they could be removed, without accusation of theft. This gave the most temperamental performers pause, and food for thought (the money having been always already largely spent) in the many conflicts that took place under the régime of the excitable little owner ; but also it gave the feeling that the animals were not private property, but were owned by the Circus, that is, by the whole company ; so that everyone took an added interest in their welfare.

When, for instance, Augusto, the big 600-pound lion, became the proud father of triplets, his second lot that year, it seemed to everyone like a personal triumph.

The three cubs became at once the pets of the Circus, adored, spoilt by all, from Lopez to the latest-joined hanger-on. They were playful and mischievous, and loved fondling, leaping without fear into arms and laps. To see them gambol with their parents was in itself a mirthful sight :—the terrible little growls of rage, the cautious crouching, the sudden spurts and jumps, the little bites and tuggings, worry-worry, all knocked over by a huge, sudden paw, all spread abroad in sprawlings, deliciously abandoned, little legs waving, fat tummies upwards, all dissolved in inane, happy laughter ; while a grin slowly spreading on the huge chops showed the keen Olympian enjoyment above. The proud paternity

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of Augusto, and his human playfulness, this it was, all agreed, that made him King of Beasts : this and his capacity of love for another—dog or man. A dog, indeed, was the great friend of Augusto. Caring nothing for ordinary doggy pleasures, and with a strained look on her face as if heavily aware of her importance, Lucille sat beside the lion family, parading the strange, inverted friendship. The lioness, as if in token of her years of unwavering allegiance, even allowed her to play with the cubs. It was said that Lucille had actually fed one of them once, along with her own puppy, that winter when the lioness was so ill.

As for the smallest baby-lion, Alberto, he and Hans soon became inseparable. It followed him about the camp like a puppy, and, whenever he sat down, walked promptly on to his lap, where it would lie with one small round ear cocked, and one eye on its friend, waiting for the warm, pleasant tickling on its neck and shoulders, when it would at once stretch itself out and go to sleep. At night Hili was compelled to permit the animal to sleep under her bed, it would roar lustily at food-time, and if not attended to at once would eat shoes. It puzzled her that Lopez (whose property, after all, it was) allowed it this free and casual existence. But Lopez did not worry if his trainer made no complaint : and his trainer, a large, fair, wise old Swede, knew that the cub was safe.

But sometimes, to Hans's sorrow, Alberto had to be shut up. There are some occasions when even the most charming baby-lions are not wanted : and some things which even the most kind-natured must not see. During the circus performances when the whole fair-ground was a mass of straggling people, pushed and pushing, gaping, trampling, squeezing in and out of the booths, it would never do to have a small lion walking about, attended only by a little boy : and in the same way the other animals, on whose performances the Circus depended, must not risk being frightened out of their lives by a sudden encounter with their natural enemy, however diminutive.

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These enforced eclipses of Alberto, however, bore some consoling colours for Hans, for then he could wander at will inspecting the other inhabitants of his world. Unable to judge their quality, he felt them only as living things, little different from himself ; and he would sit watching them for hours, unnoticed by anyone, observing their ways and habit, and uttering to them the sounds which passed with him for human speech : until at last, while still hardly marking them from man, he appeared to feel deeply within each beast its essential character.

And there were many different characters in the Cirque Lopez.

There was the young elephant, Jorge, who was so greedy that he ate up all his own food, all the food he could steal from his neighbours, and as much as he had time for, before being caught, of the tent-hangings, the straw, the fruit-peel, the rinds and ends, the paper-bags and refuse thrown down by the crowd. Being stopped, scolded, whipped, put back in his pen, where he could be manacled hind and fore, he would devour the next meal, now just about due, with the ardour of a starving lion. After this, of course, he would have a terrible pain. He would roll his eyes, trying to be sick. His master, with the curses of despair, would give him medicine inside a banana. This was a thrilling, desperate moment for the watching Hans : he could feel intensely in himself, in some extraordinary fashion, the pain of the elephant, combined with a dim human knowledge of the rescuing power of the dose.

After a while, Jorge would recover. As if nothing had happened, he would trumpet his boredom, stamping in his pen, or begging, in his most engaging manner, to be allowed out on the long chain again. His master would be firm, declining to present him once more with the opportunity of making himself ill, and would go away (knowing him securely tied) to visit some other dependent. And Jorge would be left bleating aloud his sad comments on this cruel world, louder always when any step approached : until at last some circus-hand, passing, would

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pause, perhaps with a bucket of water. Jorge's eyes would gleam, his grey, inquisitive, restless trunk with its pointed finger would stretch out, pathetically, entreatingly. When the bucket was within reach he would take one sip, just one : with the most tragic air in the world, as if overwhelmed with disappointment too deep for other expression, he would flick away from his trunk the drops of this miserable, poor, insipid liquid. Grinning, the circus-hand would disappear for a moment and coming back fling into the bucket a handful of brown sugar. At once Jorge would suck the water half-way up his trunk, and putting the end in his mouth, let it gurgle luxuriously down his throat. At these times he never failed to glance in triumph and contempt at his better behaved but less enterprising companions who had not received this treat. And Hans would be torn between his inner instinctive enjoyment with the one and his tremendous indignation with the others.

Sometimes the baby-elephants were washed : in hot weather, every midday. This was always an occasion for the maximum of noise, squealing, grunting, splashing, kicking over pails, wetness and confusion. Jorge, of course, while giving the greatest trouble, would generally succeed in obtaining the best of the attention, and sometimes, by the simple ruse of rolling in the dust immediately after his bath, would manage to secure for himself a second, unauthorised, delicious rubbing and scrubbing and sluicing.

The leader of the elephants, an elderly female of some 14,000 pounds, always watched the proceedings with interest. Greater than all the others in size and experience, her word was law in the elephant world. With blows of her trunk and buttings of her head she enforced her authority upon all the young ones and even on the males of her own rank : but with tender noises and caresses of her trunk-tip she bestowed rewards on the spoilt and infamous Jorge, who in her eyes could do no wrong. However dirty or tired they all might be after a long journey, her first care was to cleanse the ears of Jorge,

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rub his coat with her trunk, and blow sand or dust on his fleas, to disperse them.

Old Madre was a hundred and twenty years old : her chief value to the Circus (besides her Act, where she and the Clown turned the skipping-rope for the monkeys to skip) was her help with the transport of heavy baggage, especially when stuck in the mire, her experienced testing of bridges and boggy places, and her assistance in restoring order when the other animals got out of hand. At the same time she did not disdain to exhibit a temperament of her own : she was terrified of dogs and of mice, and occasionally she would panic without the least excuse. In his own way, Hans understood this, too.

But the *raison d'être* of the animals was, of course, their performance in the ring.

Here the young elephants appeared as school-boys. Their tight black coats, bulging with good food, glistened under the light of the flares as they came rollicking into the arena, swinging in circles their whip-like tails ; and, having made the round of the sawdust, gravely settled their haunches on some small, high stools. On these they sat upright, facing the Clown, who was now dressed in a pedagogue's hat and long cloak. Alas, however jaunty their behaviour, it soon appears that they are unable to solve the simplest arithmetical problems written out for them, quite clearly, on a huge blackboard. Again and again, with the utmost patience, Réné, the Clown, implores them, each by name, not to disappoint him ! It is in vain, their ignorance is colossal, incredible. At last the children in the audience are actually compelled to give them the answer. Their voices are shrill with derision as the baby-elephants leave their stools, and, each surmounted now by a long, conical, dunce's cap, depart sorrowfully to a mocking tune from the band.

Their colossal stupidity, in fact, appears only equalled by the extreme cleverness of the small pony, who always follows next. This animal can not only walk on his hind legs, supporting his fore-hoofs on the bar of a carriage which by this means he pushes before him, and which

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contains a small monkey dressed as an infant, but he can sit at a table with a cigar and a book, he can point out with his forefeet letters which spell words, and at the last he can blow with his mouth a bullet out of a pistol. This bullet invariably hits the bull's-eye.

The pushing of a baby-carriage is a good accomplishment among the animals. The Dogue Tobee—a bull-dog (in some respects) with a brass collar surrounded by frills of lace—is also an adept at it. In his case the carriage is pulled onwards by a dark invisible string which leads to the exit : as the carriage departs under his paws and he begins to lose his balance he takes a step forward, in this manner appearing to propel the vehicle with extreme precision out of the arena. This goes very well ; except on the one occasion when, the string having been too suddenly jerked, the carriage was entirely withdrawn from the dog's paws and proceeded to advance of its own accord, while Tobee, falling to its forefeet, ran round the ring joyously barking. (Those terrible few minutes remained always a searing memory to Lopez. . . .)

Then there were the geese. To see them within their pen, placidly routing about in the trough, as simple a pair of geese as ever waddled on a village green, who would have believed that within an hour or two, dressed in plaid jackets and trousers, or in scarlet frock-coats, they would be impersonating a couple of drunken musketeers, or a fashionable couple taking an airing in the Park ? For the latter, Jacques wore a bright blue coat with large copper buttons and a tall hat that was kept on by a white tape passing under his jaw : Jacquette flaunted a green skirt and a feathered bonnet, the costume enhanced by a sunshade, whose handle she clipped neatly under her wing, and a train of draggled lace mounted on pale pink silk, which swished from side to side with the motion of her waddle, in an extremely modish and haughty manner. Their master had very pale blue eyes that looked like drops of water which might at any moment run out over his cheeks : his mouth, with no teeth, had too red lips. He lived very handsomely on their earnings.

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In this strange and pleasant company Hans grew older. Among these oddities his own oddness passed easily. Nobody noticed him. People behaved in his presence as if he were not there.

Hili herself forgot to be troubled by his slow, vacant stare, by his lack of speech, by his inability to play with other children. All would pass, she thought, all would come right in the end. Young as she was, hope came to her easily.

III

She had at first, indeed, her own difficulties.

The other girls, some of them her own age, resented a little the quiet dignity of the new sewing-woman, and her assured, easy post. No trouble for *her*, they thought enviously, to seek engagements ; summer and winter she was needed : how simple,—just by being a friend of the Senhor, or by being, as they said, a baroness in her own right. What a ridiculous thing ! Whoever heard of a lady of title living in a tent ? But that was the reason, no doubt, why she gave herself airs, going about with that pale, grown-up face, when everyone could see she was no more than a child. . . . These thoughts stirred behind the dark envious looks, as one after another the performers passed—jugglers, acrobats, dancing girls ; many of them dependent on her for their very costumes, though staying with the Circus perhaps for no more than a single season.

One of these plagued her continually.

One hot, trying afternoon, this girl came to her tent complaining about a dress that did not fit, that would have to be taken at once to pieces, altered, and finished again in time for the evening performance. It was one of those Eastern dresses that gave Hili unending trouble. Cataracts of tiny gold beads threaded on fine strings were its chief adornment, forming a golden waterfall that swayed and clinked with every step. Unfortunately, these threads were always catching on something ; when one broke the whole string of beads would be scattered;

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and Hili, from her bead-box, would have to construct another. For the whole afternoon the girl stayed in the tent, pulling this shimmering cascade from one hip to the other, considering its maximum effectiveness. Patiently Hili waited : she was quite aware this excessive deliberation was unnecessary. At last the girl decided what she required. "And remember," she cried departing, grandly, "this must be ready without fail by the evening."

With all speed Hili set about her task : it was already late afternoon. She worked as quickly as she knew, the dress was elaborate and covered with trimmings. When the cascades were finished there were still the other decorations to be added—the enormous jewels, made of tin, light in weight, very dazzling, and beautifully shaped, to represent cut stones : or rather half a cut stone, the obverse being a hollow, ringed with a metal rim bearing loops to sew it on by. By this device the jewels' huge magnificence seemed to be embedded in the very substance of the cloth itself. It was impossible not to stop for a second to admire them, and the glowing garment they adorned. But there was no time to be wasted : enough had been lost already.

An hour before the evening performance the girl returned, shouting at the tent-door. Hili was now occupied with the head-dress, an affair of red gauze ornamented with flowers and pearls. The small flowers were scarlet and shaped like a cup, their petals made of a thin and hard substance difficult to manipulate. A gold thread, heavily knotted, was passed through each pearl and thence through the heart of the flower : the knot held the pearl in place, the pearl held the flower to the gauze.

It needed all the concentration of clever fingers to do this task neatly, in an accurate pattern, and at the same time as quickly as possible. Hili did not answer the screaming voice outside. "*Esgoto! Cloaca!*" shouted the girl with studied insolence. After a moment she thrust aside the canvas and flung herself into the tent. Hili was sitting quietly at the table, sewing her pearls.

"Why did you not answer when you were spoken to?"

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said the girl rudely. "I called your name several times at the door."

"Not my *name*, I think," said Hili, snipping the gold thread.

"Oh, I see. I suppose you want your title, Madame la Baronne? Or is it *gnädige Frau*? Or is it *Condesa*? Or is it *Contessina*? Or *Duchesse*, or *Marquise*? Or perhaps it is your *Serene Highness* or your *Exalted Excellency*, or your *Majesty*, perhaps you would even like that? Yes, you consider yourself grand enough for that, I have no doubt. But let us certainly get your name right, and your title too. If you *have* one. The whole Circus will be delighted to hear it. They lie awake at night wondering if perhaps they have failed to address you with sufficient ceremony. It will be *such* a relief for them to know your real name, once and for all. Perhaps you would be so condescending as to indicate what one is to call you?"

Hili flushed. She saw the pretty young face, heated with temper, the black curls flashing, the gold ear-rings swinging against the yellow neck with the vehemence of the speech.

"Call me *Marie-Céleste*," she said evenly. "That, at least, is my name. I can remember being christened."

She paused. The other seemed suddenly at a loss, her anger, missing its mark, seemed to hover stupidly in mid-air. It seemed impolite to leave her there, looking awkward, gaping a little, not knowing what to say next, with no one to help her out.

"And you?" said Hili kindly, "may I, too, have the pleasure of knowing your name?"

"*Senhora Catharina Henriqueta Leonora y Conchita Yzquiando de Alberti*. And don't you forget it!" A returning triumph swelled her.

"I see. Well, I am *Marie-Céleste*."

She said no more, she finished the head-dress in silence, fitted it on the greasy curls, arranged it to the other's taste, and turned to go on with the further items of her work.

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"Say, how old are you?" said the girl suddenly, staring at her. "Before I joined here, they said you were an old, old woman, fifty years in the Circus! Then I heard you were a clever, vain adventuress, a meretrix, a black proud woman who had only an ill-gotten babe in spite of her schemes. But now I find, I do believe, you are just an ordinary girl, like me."

"Why, of course, just an ordinary girl like you. Except that I don't think I'm even quite as old as you are."

From this conversation there soon arose a friendliness, and Hili was not plagued any more by her tormentor—at least, not maliciously.

For it soon appeared that the fair Catharina harboured "schemes" too, and realising, in spite of what she had said, that Hili was by no means an "ordinary girl" but possessed a considerable knowledge outside circus life, she applied continually for information regarding that world to which her ambitions aspired.—How they ate, the ladies of fashion, what they talked of, what they wore, which was the most correct expression for a gentleman of rank to use on meeting a lady, what was her proper rejoinder when he kissed her hand? . . .

Hili answered these sometimes very intricate conundrums to the best of her ability, using her invention freely where knowledge failed. It pleased Catharina to believe herself acquiring the customs of polite society, and there was sadly little chance of her mistakes ever being discovered. With an ever-growing, dog-like devotion Catharina haunted Hili's tent.

She was not its only visitor. The young men of the Circus, those handsome, cheerful, healthy, athletic creatures, could not fail to notice the lovely child's face when it appeared on the fair-ground or in the canteen. When a camp was newly pitched and the first of the work over, they would lean against a post beside her tent, asking her if all was correct, if she was comfortable, if anything was missing, if there was not any task they could do for her.

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Sometimes, too, on evenings when there was no performance, the new ring-master, he who had travelled all over the world, would beg her to come out and talk with him. Here they would sit, at her tent-door, in the scented golden dusk, hearing afar the country noises, wrapped in a spell of silence. Sometimes he would bring her trifles he had purchased in the town, giving them to her with a lightness his deep glance belied, trying to make her arrange to meet him somewhere, to go for a jaunt with him, to give him anything, if only a promise. . . .

Nordsig, the old Swede, the lion-tamer, came on them one evening while this situation was in progress. Since the adoption of Alberto his acquaintance with Hili had strengthened considerably. He pulled up, and sat down, too, and joined in the talk, thinking to use his old man's privilege to help the wheels of courtship, and the ring-master, his friend.

"Ah, what it is to be young!" he began diplomatically. "How I envy you two, with all your lives before you! Happiness within your grasp, to take up as you will. You particularly, little one, have you considered the life that still is yours? Why, your foot is hardly yet upon its threshold. Why don't you enjoy yourself more? Why won't you go to the festa, as Svenberg asks? He is kind, I know him well, he will take care of you. Entrust yourself to him, my pretty child: you can't mope in one tent for ever. Has it not crossed your mind that one day you should be thinking of getting married?"

Hili stared. As if the whole realisation of Svenberg's attitude had suddenly flooded upon her she looked up at him with a wide, startled glance: then she turned to Nordsig as though she could not have heard his words correctly.

"But I *am* married," she said. She rose at once from her stool, standing stiffly as though lost in some far thought. A sound of Hans came from within the tent. She turned without a word and entered it.

Hans had long since grown too big for his cradle; he lay now on the mat in that very corner where she had

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crept years ago to take shelter with old Maria. So much had happened in her youth, in those first years! It seemed as if all her life had been spent there, as if all that could ever happen to her had been concentrated in a small space—the time that had already passed. "Your foot on the Threshold," said Nordsig. Well, there it was: he didn't know.

Thus Hili had disposed of envious curiosity: and of unwanted male attention. After a while the circus-folk began to look on her as a queer creature, too quiet for her years, but kindly and harmless, and always ready to listen to their troubles.

And by degrees her natural gaiety returned. She found, too, that her voice was not lost to her. Now, in the evenings of rest, or when they travelled the long roads, they begged her to sing to them. True and clear as ever, her voice rose on the stilled air; her songs were many, remembered from the Concert-theatre: many a mile they marched to that swinging tune of the Soldier of the Guard: even the one of the triolet, the maid who would for ever be true to her lover, she was able to give them at last without tears. The band, resting their exhausted arms and throats, viewed her complaisance with gratitude.

Of Senhor Lopez and of Herr Kranz she saw little, save in the distance. The former seemed unable to avoid, at this time, getting himself entangled, in his excitable way, in conflicts with the civic authorities: while the latter appeared wholly occupied in getting him out of them. These affairs rattled high over the heads of the circus-folk, who did their work and tended their animals unconcerned. There was only one thing that troubled Hili, the slow development of Hans. Yet always looking at his serenity, at his calm happiness, she stilled her fears.

IV

Yet some development was taking place nevertheless within the fair, solemn head. Hans was beginning to extend his understanding to the acceptance of human

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people. The sudden and violent withdrawal of Alberto was the first cause of this.

For it had been noticed for some weeks lately that the little lion was looking extraordinarily sleek, not to say corpulent ; though, at the same time, he showed little appetite for his dinner. True, he ate the lumps of meat and gnawed the bones given him, but solely, it would seem, from duty and good nature : while if his brothers challenged his share he put up a purely formal resistance.

Naturally this astonished Nordsig. He enquired everywhere whether, against his orders, Alberto had been getting scraps. He asked Hili repeatedly (it was no good asking Hans) whether she gave him meat at night in the tent.

" How should *I* have meat ? " she protested, not unreasonably.

Then Nordsig noticed that the dogs were growing bad-tempered. He decided to watch the little lion. It was some days before enough leisure could be arranged to devote to this exhaustive work. It entailed rising in the morning, before anyone else was awake, and observing Alberto from his first emergence from Hill's tent, it entailed crouching, squeezing, hiding, crawling, going without his meals and not relaxing his vigilance till nightfall. As the result of his efforts, the full iniquity of Alberto was revealed.

Quite early in the morning, before breakfast, the little creature visited the canteen. At this time the kitchen-staff were breakfasting, the cooking-tent was empty. It took Alberto a moment to lick up from the corners the bones, the scraps, the pieces of meat and fat thrown from the night before and not yet cleared up. From this appetiser he went straight to the caravan of Senhor Lopez, who fed apart. The Senhor himself was having breakfast by now, the door was open. Looking cautiously within, to make sure he was unobserved, Alberto glided to the food-trolley, a cupboard on wheels, which stood in the rear. Opening the door with a well-practised paw, he raked within for anything he could reach ; a cooked chop

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or cutlet was a great prize. With this hastily swallowed he trotted off swiftly. His next expedition was to the large van that held all meat-supplies, and which was unlocked and wheeled up by the canteen before dinner, for the cook to select what was necessary. With one leap Alberto mounted this, and, squeezing his small body under the hatch, was able to roam at will upon the meat, exercising his taste. Why he had never been caught was a mystery. He kept his ears alert, that was clear, for when steps approached from one side he leapt lightly and unseen out of the hatch on the other. After a little sleep, to compose this repast, he made a complete tour of the dogs' midday dinners, and, careful to be unobserved by any passer-by, licked the dish clean before the growling and frightened owner could object. After this he romped playfully with Hans for an hour or so, restoring his tissues (when his master went to dinner) by another visit to the canteen, where he successfully appropriated the scraps thrown to the birds. Small wonder that when his own meal-time came a polite indifference was upon him.

Nordsig took him away for ever from Hili's tent and showed him the quarters where in future he would remain. "*Thief!*" said Nordsig calmly and severely. "Nasty, common little, ordinary *thief!*" It was perfectly plain that Alberto understood. The picture of exposed guilt, he tried to bury his shame under the straw of the den, whence, fancying himself concealed, he peered with a watchful and hopeful eye at his trainer.

Hans was bitterly upset by this occurrence. For days he could not eat his own food. But Nordsig was pleased, if anything, observing mildly that it was quite a good thing that Alberto should have received a lesson so early, and that he had no doubt he would become the cleverest and best of all the lions in the end.

Robbed thus of his beloved companion, Hans was able to focus his mind elsewhere. Sometimes he stared at the Cinderella's coach, gaudy and flashing, mocking the daylight, as it stood waiting its turn, outside the shabby tent walls. Or within the tent, his eye would be caught

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suddenly by a spitting flash of light as the gem-set crowns revolved. Yet these things bore little meaning for him, he would gaze with the same interest at the horses' mangers which were only canvas troughs on slings.

In the long afternoons he would sit on his haunches gluing his eyes to the changing scene. When there was no matinée, little was done in the afternoon : in this vacuum the characters of the players seemed to emerge wistfully, individually, no longer dominated by the tremendous idea of their calling.

The watery-eyed master of the geese, who would have known that his soul's one desire was for cheese, that he spent all his spare cash on this commodity, and all his spare time mouthing it with his toothless gums ? He seemed almost more fantastic than his birds, for though they, too, ate all day, at least they did so in a seemly and bird-like manner. Then there was the dwarf who never tired of telling everyone how he and his wife (also twenty-seven inches tall) had raised a family of nine children of normal height, most of whom resided in great prosperity on farms in their own country ; but the youngest of whom, as soon as he had saved enough money for the journey, had promised to join the Circus with his father and mother, and carry them out of the ring, when they had done their turn, one under each arm, to the wonder of all.

Hans used to stare, too, a good deal, at the ebony-black, who lifted weights. The grease of this man's skin was so strong that it stained his loin-cloths. Every day he had to have a new one. His skin shone purple in the sunlight, and the muscles rippled under it like water. He used to oblige his wife to rub his legs and arms for hours together ; the patient woman did so, groaning. When she was quite worn out he would command her to do a dance with her stomach in which she excelled, signifying his approval by guttural cries. Finding words difficult, he gesticulated solemnly with his hands, that were black above and had a pale pink lining, and on whose backs a small lucky coin was always fastened with fine silver

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chains ; he tried to signify by his gestures that he belonged to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. He had two topics that everyone was tired of. He used to deliver them to the mute Hans. They were his voodoo, and how he had narrowly escaped lynching in West Georgia.

Yet, in all, Hans had a greater freedom than would have been accorded to anyone of full wits. Even the clown Réné allowed him to enter his tent and to sit cross-legged on the floor while he dressed and painted his face.

Réné always wore a cap made of an old white stocking, which had been pulled on, cut off short, and sewn up. It brought him luck, he said simply. Whether it did or not no one could have told, for anyone unluckier it would have been hard to meet. When some unusually disastrous affair had overtaken him, when, for instance, his umbrella, on which the pith of his joke depended, had failed to open at the critical moment, or when his one suit of clothes got drenched in the rain, or when he had his wallet stolen from him containing all his savings, he had always the same consolation. "Well, well, my friends, I am convinced if it had not been for my *Cap*—" (so-and-so, an even worse tragedy, would have happened).

He much enjoyed changing, without warning, the geometrical designs on his face, which changes, he fully believed, caused as intense surprise among his associates as delight in the audience. Sometimes he would paint a red triangle on each cheek-bone, point downwards, to induce an air of lugubrious gloom : sometimes his face bore horizontal stripes, from nose to ear, to indicate jollity, heartiness, roaring-with-laughter. Or sometimes he would place three scarlet spots, in a row, on his forehead, and one on the end of his nose : this gave him a short, puzzled, comical expression, which suited him best of all.

He altered his costume in the same way, that is, to suit his own fancy. Perhaps his sleeves were too long and touched the ground, or his trousers so wide that they tripped him up, to his continuous embarrassment,

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so that he had to keep saying, "Pardon, Messieurs et Mesdames!" at the same time raising his hat, from which would fall a shower of flour, water, or confetti.

How he laughed over his jokes, Réné! Taking Hans quite early into his confidence (possibly because he spoke so little), he would detail to him in advance the niceties of his next attack on the broad lands of humour. His face when unpainted was childish and simple, and certainly he himself enjoyed jests more easily than anyone.

Yet even he had a weapon of his own; and the only people in the world whom he despised were other clowns. "I could have forgiven him," he would say, speaking of some famous jester, "if his make-up had been better, but even his *lines* weren't good," thus by delicate homage to pure art planting a thorn in the listener's mind.

Yet from these human contacts (which to be sure he scarcely understood) Hans always turned back instinctively to the beloved animals.

One morning he watched the ring-horses being trained to the Spanish canter, with weights attached by short ropes to their feet. To avoid being entangled the horses had to lift their feet high in the air at each step; their heads bore only a slender cord; their mouths were so tender that only the lightest of touches was necessary for their control. Seeing these animals actually being taught, being directed in each movement by a human mind, Hans began to understand them at last as something not superior to man but dependent on him for governance and support. From the moment of this realisation a different feeling overtook him: in his unformed way he experienced a desire to show himself to these beings as their friend. Each day he presented himself at the ring-side where these lessons were taking place. At last the ring-master ordered him off the ground altogether. Where nervous and expensive horses are being taught is no place for a child.

Hans turned his attention, then, to Nordsig, the lion-trainer.

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He trotted around after Nordsig like a second shadow. Giving no trouble, hardly ever speaking, Nordsig could not find him an encumbrance. Quite soon he welcomed his silent, sympathetic company.

So these two attended to the lions of the Circus as the months slipped by. Hans was not allowed near the steel arena, where the work was carried out, but gradually he became able to assist the trainer in the many duties that went on behind the scenes. He was useful, for instance, in their small ailments, especially toothache or foot trouble. It seemed to Nordsig as if the pained animals were calmed by the nearness of the small, solemn child, as if they listened to his queer sounds with more attention than to their trainer's voice. Hans seemed to know instinctively at what moment the body-odour of ammonia given off by these big cats had caused them headaches : and after opening the ventilators nothing pleased him more than to be allowed to increase their happiness by giving them a piece of their beloved cat-nip. Watching them both, Nordsig could see reflected in the child's body the very pleasure of the lions, as they rolled, playing, licking and purring.

In the autumn a dreadful thing occurred. Domingo's (brother of Alberto) tail began to get fat. Nordsig bandaged it and plastered it, but that was of no avail. It swelled beyond the bandages, whose stricture evidently caused much pain, it grew larger and fatter every day. It began to absorb all Domingo's strength, and his nourishment too, for as it swelled he shrank. At last it was so heavy he could scarcely drag it around. As for any appearance in the ring, that was out of the question. Reluctantly Nordsig determined on amputation.

One morning, with much pain and bloodshed, the tail was cut off successfully within three inches of the stump. After this Domingo miraculously began to recover. Hans grieved dreadfully over this fatal loss to his beauty, consoling himself only that it was not his still-beloved Alberto. But Nordsig was only impressed by the extraordinary helpfulness the child Hans had supplied, not

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least by his untroubled stolidity during the difficult and dangerous operation.

After this he treated Hans as an ally and an equal.

Hans acquired from him, in his dim way, quite a store of animal knowledge. That the staring coat of a lion or tiger means indigestion, and should be treated at once : that it is wrong to give small pieces of meat, but right to give large lumps that must be torn ; that a pound of fresh meat is of more value than three of tainted : that a lion and tiger must never fight each other, for the victory will be always to the tiger ; that lions, tigers and leopards all naturally hate dogs, but that tigers alone can never, in any circumstances, overcome their hate : that lions, who breed twice yearly, are more profitable than tigers, who have one cub only every two or three years. That in-breeding causes rickets and rheumatism and uncertain tempers, and minds that can never be trained : but that also it often gives cross-eyes, so that it can usually be detected. That lions are reared in frankness and firmness but that tigers and leopards, do what you will, are reared in hate and mistrust. Finally, that nothing is more foolish than to overfeed the beasts. " Too much food and they all get lazy. Lazy and stupid ! Won't trouble to think. They'd even hurt themselves or each other by running into a danger which their minds have become too dull to see. And not only that. Too much luxury and good food and they won't produce cubs. Like flowers—too rich soil, all leaves, no seed. Fine fat haunches, good heavy shoulders, beautiful glossy pelts ; but no cubs.—Then, too, they *must* be barred up, cats. They have no sense of home. Elephants are different : they can rid themselves of their bonds almost whenever they like ; yet everyone knows how they will remain obliging tied by one loop thrown over a stake. Yet elephants, if they strayed, would find plenty to live on, they wouldn't starve. But cats—open the cage and off they'd streak, even if they were born on the place and knew no other. So thoughtless. For of course they find nothing to eat, and when you go out and chase them

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you come on them at last, weak and miserable ; and even then they don't really want to come back home."

Absorbed by all these busy and shifting impressions the time passed for Hans in a dream. "What are you thinking, my little son ?" Hili would ask, a vague fear at her heart. "Come, talk to me. Let us play at something, whatever you'd like. Or shall we go for a walk, just you and me ?"

He would look at her, kindly and solemn, and she would know at once that his interest was not in anything that took him away from the Circus. 'He's only a child yet,' she would think. 'How can I hope to find a companion in him so soon ?' She would pick up her knitting again, and continue it steadily.

For she had never succumbed to all the Circus traditions. In making clothes for Hans sometimes she knitted also.

"Eh, eh, *knitting*, Marie-Céleste," said the other women, "you'll bring him bad luck ! You'll bring us all bad luck ! I cannot bear to see you knitting an early death. You or your child, it's all the same, you'll bring an early death on one of you ! And if it isn't one of you, it'll be one of us !"

Hili smiled serenely, a little absorbed because she was counting the stitches, and proceeded to turn the heel.

But the very next week these words recurred to her with a startling emphasis.

C H A P T E R X X V I

I

O NCE more they were in the south of Spain, the time once more was spring.

At this season, in the midst of the blossoming world, the people were accustomed to cramp their spirits into bonds imposed by their faith, most notably rigid in this region, where religion dominated the very air and soil. All through February and March the period ordained for fasting had continued: meat and many other foods were forbidden; but to employ the time spent usually on preparation and consumption of meals, and to make up, in some measure, for their natural conviviality, pious processions were organised in all the towns. Life-sized effigies of saints, ornamented with silver and tinsel, together with crosses and lighted candles, were carried through the streets and squares, whose crowds were also entertained with open-air sermons ending often in epileptic frenzies. The night before Good Friday the effigy of Christ paid visits to all the shrines in the neighbourhood: these calls being duly returned. Thus were the people kept busy and innocently occupied. On Good Friday itself every particle of gold, silver, brass, tin, tinsel, beads and glass were collected for the greatest procession of the year. Even the children, fantastically dressed, took part in this. Abraham, Solomon, the Queen of Sheba, all were represented by childish faces, proudly important. All day long they strutted through the streets of the town. All day long the folk of the Circus heard the sound of this religious music drifting up under their flapping empty awnings.

But the moment this last rite was over, the whole flood

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of pent-up desires, thus artificially stimulated, was released. With one accord the entire town poured out of its houses in holiday mood. The restaurants, the squares, the theatres, and, of course, the Circus, were filled at once with flushed, excited people in traditional holiday attire. Their blue jackets, their buckled plush breeches, their white cotton stockings, scarlet sashes and broad black hats flashed brightly under the young sun. Every day there were bull-fights. Several horses were killed, and one man. All the bulls were killed. Even the famous Luiz the Red, he who had already killed twice, was killed. From these scenes of blood the people streamed again to the fondas, again glutted themselves on the now permissible meat and wine.

Whether it was the feasting or the drinking, or the roused national sentiment, or the high, violent tempers which flowed from these sources that caused the trouble at the Circus, nobody knew. It was generally accepted (by those of non-Spanish origin) that these saintly and religious people were terribly revengeful, and still hated the French.

A simple act of Réné, the French clown, was suddenly conceived by the populace to convey a pointed reflection on their own beloved hero, General Castanos. This supposition was ridiculous, but that did not make any difference. Their spirits were up, they saw offence in everything. Instead of staying away, like reasonable folk, from a spectacle they did not approve, they massed nightly at the Circus in greater numbers. In vain Réné changed his Act : unlucky man, even his famous cap did not shield or warn him. The new turn, which he so anxiously concocted, was now instantly acclaimed to be a savage, deliberate, and intentional attack upon one of the most sacred dogmas of their Church.

Their susceptible feelings, already excited, needed only this to make them boil over. On the second night of Réné's new performance he was not able to finish it, so loud were the yells, hisses, and execrations that poured from the audience on all sides. On the third night he was not even allowed to begin.

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The nature of the objection was by this time known to him. There he stood, that night, the miserable Réné, unable to perform his Act, incapable of improvising a substitute. With the paint on his face ludicrously cancelling his expression, he protested with tears that they were mistaken, altogether mistaken ; he was a Christian, just like them, he was not at all like the heathen English ; if he were, their feelings could be understood, their feelings would indeed do them credit ; in any case, if it came to the worst, would his noble patrons kindly consider, how could the production of three white pigeons from under his hat constitute any impugnment of the Holy Church ?

The only answer to this was a renewed uproar, the shaking of fists, the stamping of feet : terms of the very vilest meaning were flung into the arena : the Circus and all its inhabitants were consigned without mercy to the devil.

Of course, no circus-master could stand this : Senhor Lopez least of all. Bouncing into the centre of the ring, flashing all around his furious indignation, and snapping his fingers in an ecstasy of anger, he obtained from his sudden violent appearance a momentary hearing.

"*Silence !*" he cried, "*Signoras, Caballeros !* What an intolerable interruption !"—Réné was a great clown, a very famous clown, he had performed to Crowned Heads all over Europe. If he was a Frenchman he gloried in it, it was to being a Frenchman that he owed his exquisite talent. If the pig-headed townspeople of — could not appreciate it, that was their fault, not his ! Let them, at least, not dare to criticise a skill which the countries of the world applauded ! Let them be thankful only that their miserable second-rate village was honoured by the presence of such an artiste ! Let them, above all, keep their religious prejudices to themselves and not intrude them where they did not belong—that is, the realm of Art, especially as the latter appeared to be a region above their comprehension ! . . . Tactfulness was not one of the good Senhor's many qualities.

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Before his speech was half over the whole audience was in a state of pandemonium. At the very pitch of their voices people were shouting their opinion of him and of those he employed : missiles were hurled, a tomato hit Réné on the cheek, adding its colours to his fantastic scheme ; in a moment it was followed by a volley of cokernuts brought in from the fair : the next instant, with a scream of rent planking, the seats in the cheaper rows were being torn from their supports. With one accord the audience fell to this work, either to secure the heavy pieces as weapons or with the object of wrecking the Circus altogether.

Réné, who had lost his cap, had made a dash for shelter ; Lopez was left gesticulating in the centre of the ring : at any moment he might have been overpowered ; anything, in fact, might have happened, but for Herr Kranz's swift order to the circus-hands to extinguish instantly all flares except that which led to the exit of the fair-ground.

It is not so amusing to hurl insults when you cannot behold the face of their recipient, or missiles, when you cannot see your mark, or to tear down what you may be needing yourself as a support, or to belabour your neighbour by mistake.

The sudden darkening checked everybody ; the ring and the tumult of passion it had aroused were suddenly lost to them ; all they could see was the path leading out of the field.

Here and there a glow was struck with tinder and tow, but this lighted only the underplanes of a face or two, isolated white masks, hardly seen by eyes that turned automatically to the sole source of light, the flaring beacon in the distance.

One by one, they moved sullenly towards it ; then with a vast surge the whole place suddenly emptied, pouring in a stream towards the lighted homeward road. A few shouts of anger and vengeance were all that came back at last through the night air to Lopez, as he stood, still in the ring, in the pitch-dark, wiping his brow.

"Put out the lights, would you ?" cried these dim,

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furious voices out of the blackness. " You wait, you little Portuguese. *We'll* make you a light ! " He heeded them not.

As well as they could, in the darkness, not daring to refire their flares, the circus-people closed down for the night. It was early, it seemed strange, but there was nothing else to be done. The animals who had acted in the first part of the programme were already strawed down : there remained only the horses to be unharnessed and stabled who had stood in the entrance waiting to follow the Clown, and the lions, who had not performed at all, to be wheeled back to their dens. " No dismantling of the circus tonight," said Senhor Lopez bravely, in the darkness, " that could be seen to tomorrow." (Why should he fly in the night, like a rogue, like one who is ashamed ?) When all was done, the circus-people in silence groped their way to bed. A little fear of the morrow still dwelt with them, but already their natural optimism was subduing it.

Before midnight someone, waking, heard a mutter of voices outside his tent. Instinctively aware of danger, he sprang to his feet, roused his companions and peered forth.

About a score of dark figures could be seen, stooping, moving cautiously, engaged upon some task of their own. The next second a little flicker of light flashed from one of their shielded lanterns, they crowded around it, consulting. The glow, illuminating their white cotton stockings and scarlet sashes revealed them at once as visitors from the town. With a shout, the men sprang from their tent, demanding angrily the business of the intruders ; at the same moment the heap around which the others had been crowding burst into flames, showing itself to be a bonfire of sticks and paper : as the circus-men suddenly appeared from their tent in its light, one of the roughs picked up a stone and hurled it with all his force into their midst.

The man who was hit gave one great cry that shattered the silence of the sleeping common. The others, shout-

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ing instantly the signal of alarm and danger, flung themselves pell-mell upon the assailant.

That was the start. Within a few minutes men were pouring out on all sides from tents and caravans, while from the outer ring of darkness the angry conspirators flowed in. A high tension of passion and hate swept at once, like a wave, from end to end of the circus-ground ; like a living thing the feeling vibrated in the air, rolling over and over, gathering force, catching up hearts and minds in a reckless, furious, exultant abandonment to the need of the moment.

A fight !—that was something everyone could understand. Yelling, the two sides threw themselves upon each other, the men of the Circus and the men of the town. The reason of their coming was forgotten or ignored. Their insults in the ring and their ignominious defeat were lost to mind : there remained only the age-old hatred between town and circus-people, and the chance to vent it once for all, hand-to-hand. Almost at once opposing bodies locked and struggled, knocking against ropes and pegs, falling, rising again, hitting out, clinching, wrestling—attacking the nearest of the enemy without order or method. Round the tents and wagons, over the tussocky ground in light and darkness, the furious duels shifted and churned.

Yells split the air on every side. Everyone was shouting in his own tongue. The Japanese juggler was jumping up and down in a passion of frenzy, his face distorted like one of his own battle-masks. His only idea of fighting was to trip up the Spanish legs with a blow behind the knee, or to leap on their backs suddenly, thus bringing them to the ground. Réné, the cause of all the trouble, mounted on a caravan roof, was waving like a banner the identical white stocking from which his lucky cap had been cut, and shouting “*Vive la gloire ! A moi la victoire !*” with simple and childish enthusiasm. Nothing but the confusion prevented him drawing upon himself, by this foolish exposure, the entire fury of the mob.

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Instead, their attention was suddenly centred on the ebony-black who had appeared, all at once, in their midst, stark-naked (as he had leapt from his tent), uttering aboriginal cries and swinging a club above his head so fast that it flashed like a wheel. His enormous muscles, knotting and flowing with this exercise, gave a sense of terrific strength concentrating and ready to spring forth at any tangent: this and his ferocious glare kept the crowd at bay for a moment. "*Goat without horns!*" yelled somebody suddenly from the heart of it. For an instant, at the impact of this unforgivable reference to cannibalism, it looked as if the black would burst. His veins stood out at his temples, his whole body stiffened into a second's immobility: then he charged the crowd. The mêlée closed round him: for a minute or two his flail was seen delivering blows upon black-hatted heads, then he tripped; just as he fell a scream of pleasure and triumph rang from the other end of the ground. At once the crowd around him broke away, running off rapidly in this direction: he was left sitting on the ground, looking dazed, and bellowing, in his recovered tongue, how he had narrowly escaped lynching in West Georgia.

The cause of the crowd's pleasure was at once apparent: the canteen, or food-tent, had been broken into.

Round this an excess of tumult raged; everything was smashed, hurled down, torn open; food was savagely flung about, on every side were flying missiles. Bottles were thrown out: the crashes of breaking glass turned everyone crazy. By this time, all over the fair-ground were flaring the bonfires of paper and shavings set up by the invaders. In their changing light the scene leapt and twisted. Their long tongues shot out, streaming down the wind, the damp grass hissed under their flying touch. Running between these scattered points, and dodging their opponents, the townspeople began to be drawn to the one focus—the canteen-tent. Yet in the centre of the ground there raged still the main body of the conflict, milling and churning on its own axis,—the fight of the more stable elements in the crowd against

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the powerful company of able-bodied circus-hands, sternly determined not to let their foes escape without punishment and defeat. These fought in silence, saving their strength. Suddenly, arising from the heart of this throng, a screamed oath ripped the air. A stiletto had been used.

After this the violence on both sides reached an ungovernable pitch. The whole ground was a mass of struggling forms. The continuous roar of confused noises, now pierced by cries of terror, hatred, and revenge, rising above the crashing of glass and breaking of timber, witnessed the foaming and frenzied passions loosed among the mob; and added to this was now the shrill cackling of the geese, the whinnying of horses, the screeches of monkeys, and the alarmed trumpeting of elephants.

All this time Lopez had been tearing about, admonishing, expostulating, cursing, threatening, and imploring. In that angry tumult he was not even heard, he was heeded no more than a fly. Even Kranz, whose judgment had earlier saved the situation, was now as helpless as the owner. The semi-darkness, the confusion, the uproar, called only for an arm that could hit out: the voice of authority was valueless. Suddenly he saw Réné on the caravan top. "Get down at once!" he shouted. "Do you want to be slaughtered?" Very reluctantly the Clown climbed down. "For God's sake make yourself useful!" yelled Kranz. "If you can't, get back into your tent."

"Useful?" said Réné delightedly. "Certainly: I will go and see how my pigeons are getting on."

On the way at the back of the tents he met Nordsig, who was blazing with an icy, fierce anger. "What are you doing here, you little buffoon?" cried Nordsig.

"Why, I was just going to see if the pigeons were all right . . . this really isn't their fault, you know."

"Not their fault?" cried Nordsig, who was quite convinced the whole affair was caused by Réné's criminal stupidity over the pigeons. "Perhaps you will send

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them off to fetch assistance from some of your Crowned Heads?"

Réne whimpered as if Nordsig had struck him: but Nordsig was still angry. This night's business, whatever would come of it, would set back immeasurably the training of his cats, distress their nerves, unsettle their minds. Whichever side won the fight outside, it might take months for his lions to forget their fear.

Making his way to the extreme end of the fair-ground, he lifted, at last, with the least possible disturbance, the flap of the canvas shelter that covered them and peered in. The side-boards were still up; it was always his practice to have it so at night, to give ventilation, while the canvas kept out light and the sights of the world. But not the sounds!—that terrible clamour surged in even here, dimmed, but not less alarming. Should he drop the side-boards, consigning the beasts to headaches rather than to terror? He hesitated. The cats were all awake, he felt sure, yet they were still perfectly quiet, just as they had been at his previous visit. Well, if they were not frightened, that was the best, that was more than could have been hoped for. Better surely to leave it thus, thanking Heaven, than to startle them by some further unusual proceeding. As for the fight, he knew these fights, this one would soon be over: at any time now, one side or the other would admit defeat. It was dark within the lions' shelter, he could see nothing, but he stopped for a moment, listening intently. Reassured once more by the sounds of their quiet breathing, he dropped the flap silently and turned away.

Almost at once he caught on his nostrils a queer tang—sharp, subtly familiar, veering on the wind. With swift strides he passed up behind the long line of wagons and carts which, unloaded and resting on their shafts, formed a dark irregular wall behind the booths and tents. Beyond this, he knew, lay the ring-stock and the led-stock, stabled within their canvas stalls—their terrified whinnies came on the air towards him. At the same moment, from the right, was wafted again the bitter

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familiar scent. Smoke! Something was on fire, something was burning. Instantly he began to run in its direction: just ahead lay the wagons containing stores and provisions, with hay and fodder; and beyond them, near some trees, were the elephants, tethered. He turned the corner between the trees and the massed vehicles, coming at once upon an extraordinary sight. The whole of the other side of the hay-wagon was spurting with flames.—Too well the invaders had fulfilled their threat to give the Circus a light. One of their bonfires, blown against the wheels, had set the outhanging hay afire. Little snakes of flame ran up the stalks, throwing up a brilliant sudden light, dying and renewing themselves more strongly. In this leaping glow stood the row of elephants, their eyes starting from their heads, their huge ears flapping, their grey bodies swinging from foot to foot. The young ones were squealing with terror, Jorge, at the end of the line, with his trunk twisted towards Madre, the loudest of all. But for once Madre did not heed him. She was butting and banging the full-grown young bull, Stephano, who stood beside her, rolling back his eyes, raising his trunk in the air, and shivering all over. At that moment the wind veered, a column of smoke billowed towards the pickets. Jorge, enveloped, set up piercing screams. In a second Madre had unloosed her bonds and was rushing towards him. The next moment a burst of flame three feet high sprang from the doomed wagon, and upon that sudden, terrifying upthrow followed the maddened bellow of Stephano, as he turned, tearing up his stakes, and crashed off wildly away from the fire. Away from the fire was towards the circus-ground, the line of wagons barred progress on one side, the trees on the other. Towards the circus-ground Stephano crashed, its noise came to his ears ever louder and more blaring: he was lost to all sense but a savage desire to trample, to overcome, to destroy the terror that filled him.

"Madre! Madre!" cried Nordsig desperately: she turned from the blubbering Jorge and made at once after

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the wild, crashing and plunging figure. Nordsig ran at full speed behind her. "Wilhelm! Luiz!" he shouted, hoping he might be heard by the men. In that confused uproar his voice was lost. He ran still towards the scattered lights, the breaking glass, the whirling turmoil of the crowd. Suddenly out of this din one cry rose sharply, hitting the stars. "The elephants are loose!"

Like chaff before wind the throng scattered: to right and left the little figures ran, caught in a panic more dreadful than any: behind them like an avenging god raged Stephano, tearing up all that lay in his path—tents, poles, booths, trucks.

Towards him now from both sides were racing men with bull-hooks, all else forgotten. The hooks tore his flesh but could not stop him. Up and down he raged between the tents, trumpeting wildly, rolling his trunk into a drum and lashing it forth again on all he could seize to destroy. Within a few minutes the whole of the townspeople had fled: the circus-folk, terrified, crouched behind shelters, ready to fly; there remained in the open only the knot of men manoeuvring to capture the maddened elephant, and Herr Kranz, at one side, giving orders. Suddenly Stephano turned; he saw Kranz there, standing alone; a flame from a wisp of straw leapt up, lighting him: as if to vent on this one body his concentrated fury and terror, Stephano charged.

All the men rushed forward. Madre came up at a gallop. With the whole force of her weight she butted against that plunging mass: under her pressure it swerved, it gave way before life could be trampled out of the fallen body. Swift as thought the men pulled it aside out of danger; at the same time, with blows of her trunk, Madre followed up her advantage on the young bull.

Stephano was quelled. For a moment he stood, dazed, shivering all over: instantly the bull-hooks were sunk firmly into the hollows above his ears and a length of steel cable locked round a foreleg. As if he knew not what had happened he stood quite still, allowing them to

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do this : then, harnessed to Madre, he followed her quietly back to the pickets. The stores-wagon had been steadily burning itself out ; the last of the flames were now quenched rapidly by all hands. The baby-elephants, exhausted by their ecstasy of fear, were soothed by the invaluable Madre : the culprit Stephano was chained to her, and double-picketed for the night.

The mangled body of Kranz had been taken up in a canvas sling and deposited upon his own bed : Lopez had sent the swiftest pony in the Circus galloping into the town to beg the immediate assistance of a doctor.

He spent the whole night, Lopez (or rather the early morning), beside his Redacteur, bandaging the wounds where the skin was broken, chatting to him excitedly, giving him sips of cognac, and cursing his folly in having ever engaged that unlucky clown René. The first grey shafts of dawn, lighting the sky, found him still sleepless at the bedside of his friend.

And Hili was sleepless, too. More, she was tormented with a wild and terrible fear. For Hans had disappeared.

Quite at the beginning, at the first start of the trouble, he must have gone. She had said good night to him, placing the little bowl of water beside him under the crucifix, and then she had slept : angry shouts and yells had awakened her, and when she had turned to him Hans was not there. All through that dreadful night she had wandered, calling here, searching there, peering into the spinning eddies of struggling figures to see if her child was amidst them. Even to the lions' shelter she had gone, daring not enter, but calling softly to her son. Between these visits she had fled back to the tent a hundred times to see if he had meanwhile returned. Now all was over and yet he was absent. What disaster had overwhelmed him ? Her mind raised a dozen fearful visions. The long grey fingers of the morning stole through the opening of the tent : she could not stay within it ; even though she had already searched everywhere she must search again.

At once, automatically, though without hope, her steps

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led her to the lions. Now she lifted the flap fearfully, and peered within. The greyness was darkened here, but outlines were just visible. Stretched quietly on the floors of their dens were the great beasts, Alberto, Domingo, and the rest. Around them rose the sharp perpendicular strokes of iron that were the cage-bars, keenly black and white; behind these, through the shadows, showed here and there the vague, motionless mass of a huge head, set in a moon of dark hair. Suddenly at the far end of the shelter she saw him, in the half-light, a small figure, rounded in sleep.

At the sight of him whom she had feared lost for ever something rose in her heart, she ran to him under the canvas, holding out her arms, sobbing. "Hans, my little son, my darling, where have you been? Wake; come to me, it is Hili, your mother."

Hans opened his eyes. He looked at her as if he saw her not, or as if she had not spoken. Without answering, as if still in a dream of his own, he twisted his face away from her: he turned it towards the big cage beside him, holding the Nubian: and he began to utter again the queer, quiet, purring sounds with which, all night, he had comforted the lions. . . .

"So you see, my dear," said one of the women, "that's what comes of knitting. It's only by the mercy of Heaven that we escaped so lightly. A burnt wagon and poor Herr Kranz, who will be on his back, they say, for years. Why he wasn't killed one cannot understand. Well, it was a near thing, no one can deny. But please don't knit any more. It makes us all very nervous. After this I don't think any of us could stand it."

So Hili promised: to the relief of everybody she gave the whole Circus that promise.

Out of the tumult of that night only two things remained with her. She knew that she must not knit again: and she knew now, for ever Hans would never really love her, Hans, whatever happened, would never be the same as others.

II

After the departure of Kranz, Lopez seemed lost.

It was not only that he grieved for the misfortune of his friend. Indeed, in a way, Kranz was luckier than some. The Mayor of the town himself sent a carriage to fetch him to the hospital, and, far from ordering the instant departure of Lopez and his Circus which had so incensed public feeling, he actually conveyed solicitations on a disaster for which he feared his fellow-citizens were in some measure to blame. Even the townsfolk themselves, their anger entirely forgotten, collected a sum to recompense the unfortunate owner for the loss and destruction their own hands had caused. This was very gratifying : Lopez responded to it at once in the warmest manner : but it did not restore Herr Kranz.

For months after this incident the Chefredacteur, he who used to be so energetic and peremptory, wandered about the Circus-grounds plunged in gloom, unable to make decisions on any matter, prophesying always the worst, and declaring his intention of retiring altogether from this wearying and unsatisfactory mode of life.

It soon became clear that in spite of his tribute to his "exquisite talent" Réné was out of favour. Nobody was surprised when, on the first opportunity, the Clown found himself an engagement elsewhere. By the end of the next summer, indeed, only about a quarter of the original company remained. This was not in itself surprising, most circus-people like change ; and in any case it is good to have always some new Acts.

But for Hili these alterations bore a strange fruit.

Amid that shifting population gossip swayed, murmured, dwindled, died down, and rose again in a different guise. . . . From the confused tales that were repeated and repeated of the happenings of that famous evening, now retreating ever more rapidly into the distance, one idea began to crystallise, handed on from season to season, and hardening at last into a concise shape that defied

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doubt. In some mysterious, but incontrovertible manner, the Sewing-woman and the Future were connected.

Hili discovered this, quite by accident, one wet afternoon.

A girl stood at her tent, blushing a little, a little embarrassed, but also full of hope and eagerness. "May I come in, Madame Céleste ? I want to ask you a very special favour ! Do please grant me it, it will make me so happy. I wouldn't bother you, but that I know, of course, like everyone else, of your kind heart and your extraordinary powers ! So—will you tell my fortune ? "

"Fortune ? But I can't, my dear Elsa. I wouldn't know anything about it. But come in, of course. I'd be only too glad to have your company. Come in, we'll have some of that nice stuff—tea. I learnt long ago how to make it. And if *you* will tell me your fortune, that will be very much better ! I shall listen with interest, my dear. I shall be pleased to know of your life and your doings."

"Ha-ha, you are joking, Madame Céleste. You know quite well what I mean. It is the future only I want to learn. What will happen and all that. Like you told those people the time there was that fire, when the Circus was only saved from being burnt to the ground by someone having remembered your warnings ! Everybody knows abouf it. I heard it the very first thing as soon as I came here. You helped them then. Won't you help me now ? "

It was useless for Hili to protest. Even if she had given a long and accurate account of her total dissociation with the events of that night the stubborn Elsa would not have believed her. Over their mugs of tea Elsa continued to entreat : it was pouring with rain, there wasn't much to do, Hili was always willing to oblige anybody.

Good-naturedly she took the hand in her own ; it was pretty, fat, and dirty. She racked her brains for something to say, beginning very seriously in the approved style.

"I see a long life here ; and a happy one. Great

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good fortune seems to attend it. Everything in the world that is desirable seems to be bestowed upon the fortunate individual who owns this hand!"

Hili glanced at the girl. She didn't appear much impressed. Evidently the promise of something much more concrete was what she had been hoping for. What a pity to disappoint poor Elsa.

"Wait!—let me look again more closely. Here and there some items of the future are beginning to show themselves. . . . In a—in a short while, I see, you will receive a letter. Yes, sooner or later, you will receive a letter!" (That's safe, anyway.) "Perhaps . . . possibly, it's not very clear, you may one day even receive a parcel! Just hold it to the light a bit more. . . . Yes, I thought so. Money! Money is what I see coming to you." (On Saturday next, to be exact, isn't that when you're paid?) "Yes, a nice sum of money, not very large, of course, but followed, as I can now see clearly, by other sums of equal amount. Did I not say this was a fortunate hand? Journeys, too, oh, what a lot of journeys" (safe again)—"connected, and this is the extraordinarily satisfactory part of this truly surprising fortune, connected in the most delightful way with the sums of money already mentioned!"

Hili was warming to it. Suddenly she had an inspiration. "Now, hold the hand steady, spread out the fingers a little. This is very important. . . . Forgive me for a few seconds. . . . I must concentrate deeply. . . . Ha, what do we see here? Is it?—yes, it is! It is the countenance of a young man!" (She glanced at Elsa's face, it looked delighted.) "Ha, yes: undoubtedly a young man. Let me see, a—h'm—it's just a little dim at this point—but, why yes, certainly a very, very *handsome* young man!" (Safe once more, thought Hili the sly one, pleased with herself: she felt emboldened.) "Yes, a nice, *tall, dark*, young man, with—" (Here she glanced again. The face had fallen. Bother! thought Hili, how *can* one know? Who was it Elsa went with, German, Dane, Spaniard? She couldn't remember. But

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she must say something, and swiftly; the girl already looked bewildered and unhappy.) "And of course when I say *dark* I am alluding, naturally, to that sort of half-and-half type so frequently met with: this young man, as I can now see clearly, belongs distinctly to this category: in fact, it might not be too much to say of him, looking at him rather firmly, without prejudice, that some people might almost call him *fair*. And the same with his height. When I say tall I mean, of course, naturally, of average dimensions: in fact, in other words, *short*."

The face brightened, there was a sigh of relief, an ecstatic rendering of the other hand. Hili, too, felt safely in port after rounding a very tricky promontory.

After this, of course, her reputation was made. "My dear," said Elsa to everybody, "she is wonderful. Told me all that had happened in my whole life, and all that was going to happen. Described Wilhelm exactly, minutely. I was terrified, almost, at the revelations of her secret knowledge! She told me . . ." And Elsa, her eyes dilated, her too rosy cheeks quivering, proceeded to describe all that had been passing through her own mind while Hili was speaking.

Elsa was the strong girl who stood at the bottom of the pyramid, supporting her young brothers and sisters in tiers on her arms and shoulders. Her stupidity was touching.

But Hili was troubled. A dear ghost had risen in her mind. What she had done was just the sort of lovely silly thing Perro would have done. It was almost with his voice she had spoken. Had he been there, how they would have laughed. . . .

"Oh, Perro, why cannot I ever forget you? It is thirteen years, now, since you left me. At first I was happy, like any young girl, and thought for sure you would come back soon. Then I was married and had my baby. Then during all that sad time I cared for him. Now he is a boy, he does not know me, he needs me no more. Oh, Perro, now is when I want you. Today

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was my birthday. I am twenty-nine. When one gets older one needs more and more a friend of the mind. Did you remember my birthday, today, Perro, the day you chose for it, long ago? Oh, Perro, I know now that you are dead."

III

So Hili settled down to her fortune-telling in her good-natured way.

Never were fortunes more magnificent than those dispensed by Madame Céleste. After a while she began to think, herself, that she almost seemed to have a gift for it. Mixing probabilities and generalities with some good guesses, the whole laced with the charming promises that people love to hear, she was from the first a great success. And she was thankful for it as a side-line; she had a little booth set up just near the main entrance to the circus-tent; and she even made herself a special costume—a scarlet cloak and bodice, a red, pointed head-dress bound with gold braid with a black net veil edged with sequins falling over the eyes. This latter helped to conceal her fairness and was very necessary—who would have believed a fortune-teller who had golden hair? It amazed her to find how easily her clients were pleased, and how frequently her predictions were fulfilled. The extra money, too, was welcome, with Hans's many and growing needs.

Every week she peered into the past, present and future of dozens of grimy hands: but no light came to her upon her own life, stare as she might: nor could she ever learn of the fortunes of Perroguet.

CHAPTER XXVII

I

BUT even at that moment Perroquet was out of prison. From that eternity of years spent alone in a dark cell, the Conde's sudden death had freed him.

In itself a shocking affair—the Conde, in the midst of storming at a servant, had fallen to the ground, foaming at the mouth, speechless and paralysed, dying without grace soon after—it had awakened the echoes of the whole neighbourhood.

People recalled his many dark, cruel actions of the past and all those strange, ever-floating stories, which, arising none knew how, had been suppressed instantly, or whispered only behind hands, with fearful glances. The dread of the Conde had lain on the countryside like a dark snake on a sunlit stone : nor was it lessened, but heightened, rather, by the rumours that followed his death : how, immediately after, his body had turned quite black, how the watchers at the bier had been unable to endure for long the devilish visions that visited them : while those who had had to keep guard all night had been found in the morning almost demented. . . .

None of the peasantry had dared go near the Castle ; they had crossed themselves as they passed even under the shadow of the dark pile, empty now of both master and mistress. Only the authority of the priest kept the trembling servants at their posts while the funeral arrangements were being completed.

The Alcalde (he of the bandits' ears) was as interested in these affairs as his neighbours : the disposition of the Castle and all its lands in the event of no heir being discoverable was a question in everybody's minds. "In

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the meantime, how interesting," said one, "were it possible to examine for once the interior of that ill-omened domain ; who knows what might not come to light?" These words shot like an arrow through the magistrate's mind. He remembered with a shock that nothing more had ever been heard of that unfortunate man questioned by the Conde so long ago. . . .

Summoning the whole of his civic authority, and fortified in any case by the absence of anyone likely to oppose him, the Alcalde presented himself, as soon as the funeral was over, at the Castle gates, insisting on a right to enter. Those servants that were left were too frightened to refuse. Thus, in his own person, he led the search-party that ranged the Castle from tower to cellar, finding much that was terrible and strange.

The entire floor of the Armoury was a clutter of weapons, torn from the chests and thrown down, as if each had been tested for some particular purpose and found lacking. In the Library, it was clear, a great bonfire had raged continually in the huge fire-place, the whole of the surrounding stone of the wall was blackened with smoke ; white ashes were piled on the hearth knee-high. From those books that lay there, not entirely burnt, it was evident they had all related to human love. On the other hand, the big table was laden with volumes much marked and thumbed, and covered with marginal notes, together with excerpts in the Conde's own writing on vellum. These dealt with two subjects : the safeguarding of wealth and the administration of poisons. . . .

From chamber to chamber the party went, observing, but touching nothing : at length there was nowhere left unvisited but the old dungeons and vaults. These were locked. Sternly the Alcalde demanded their opening : the trembling servants, falling on their knees, refused to obey. "What ! Am I then to have your ears also, before I can have the keys ?" This threat over-frightened the other ; one by one the dungeon doors were flung wide. Lanterns were flashed within them on the breath of their foetid air. Skeletons mouldered in two : from another a

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young mad woman gibbered and screeched : fifty-eight dogs in the last stages of disease and emaciation were discovered gasping and snorting in the vault that led to the river. The contents of others were indescribable. At last, in his little stone den, under the pale light of the grating, Perroquet was discovered.

He was haggard and white almost beyond recognition. His long beard and his hair rivalled in wildness the straw upon which he lay. But his eyes were the same. The Alcalde knew him at once. In his ribbed hand there lay the little flute he had had with him before, and a trace as of some distant music lay across the quietness of his face.

As if he felt too much affected, the Alcalde turned sharply, giving a harsh order for the man to be taken up at once and conveyed to his own house : nor did he speak again, even on the homeward journey, save to utter some cutting remarks on the inadvisability of placing power in the hands of insane noblemen.

The next day he sent for him, wondering whether he should not first have sent for a doctor. But already the man looked a little different. Fresh air, food and natural sleep had, even in twenty-four hours, brought him nearer to humanity. "Freedom's the best doctor after all," mused the Alcalde. Nevertheless, the man's condition was pitiful : he could hardly stand, his eyes were deep sunken, his flesh was shrivelled on his frame : the clear morning light revealed his sores without mercy. ("Without mercy" were the words drumming reproachfully in his mind.)

Clearing his throat of a tightness, he began to speak.

"Let me tell you at once, my man, of the horror with which I discovered yesterday your unhappy fate ; for which I feel in part my own negligence was to blame. You have been through a terrible ordeal, which many men might not have survived. . . . As perhaps you know—as you cannot know, of course !—it was established soon after your arrest that the poor Condessa had died by her own hand. This, I hope, may be some consolation to you. Meanwhile,—I don't remember your story or where

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you came from,—but you have been imprisoned here these many years. You are far from friends ; you will feel lost. Can I write to anyone for you ? Will you tell me what, in particular, you want ? ”

“ Certainly, Señor,” said Perroguet. “ I want a shave.”

In spite of himself the Alcalde smiled. If a man could speak thus there was hope for him. He looked again more closely at the gaunt, weak figure : under the curved brow was still the look he had remembered, that indomitable, dancing flicker of the eye. He began to ask him about himself, his past life, his profession, his prospects. As they spoke, the whole scene with the Conde, that long-past morning, came back to him. “ Coincidence ! ” he mused, “ despised slave of Romance ! What tribute could not life lay at your feet ! ”—But he must not prolong the interview. Already the man looked almost fainting with exhaustion from the unaccustomed exertion of talking. “ Well, my good fellow, if it was a coincidence that brought you here and imprisoned you, I can only hope your next coincidence will be a more fortunate one ! ”

“ Gracias, Señor.” Perroguet bowed. He was stiff, it hurt him, yet it pleased him, to do that. The pleasure of being required to bow carried away in itself some of the burden of the unspeakable years.

For many weeks he stayed in that hospitable dwelling. At last the time came when he felt himself strong enough to go.

As if he could not do enough for him, the Alcalde gave him new clothing—the good dress of a well-to-do citizen : a waistcoat with split sleeves, laced in front with a narrow braid, pantaloons with small buttons from waist to knee, and a low-crowned, wide-brimmed hat. It was all dark brown, even to the stockings. In a fit of impulsive generosity the Alcalde added at the last moment a scarlet sash and a walletful of money. “ Nothing—nothing at all ! A buona mano ! ” he murmured, feeling ashamed for justice.

II

How extraordinary it seemed to be sitting again in that very posada whence he had staggered, a little too merry, on that fatal evening ! It seemed just as crowded, too. You would say the very same cows, the identical mules, pigs and chickens. The little serving-girl was there, too, she had married the proprietor, they had four or five children. . . . But whereas before he had been the paltry stranger, hardly able to get attention, now he was the chief interest of all the assembly. To have been a prisoner of the wicked Conde, to have lived for so long in a dungeon in that black Castle ! Surely there must be some terrible tales he could tell them all ?

Everyone crowded round him. They would have listened endlessly to his accounts, night after night, they would have poured drinks endlessly for the solace of the hero, had he been able to give them the entertainment they sought. But Perroguet discovered that he could not say more than a few sentences before his voice tired. Besides, there was so little to tell . . . only a cankering monotony and an ever more desperate fight to ward off despair. These are things you cannot speak of in a crowded tavern filled with happy, flushed faces and the hearty noises of animals.

But, on the other hand, surely there was much to hear ? What had happened in the great world while Perroguet was shut up ? Everyone knew that while people are in prison dynasties are overthrown, new prophets arise, histories meet, are shaken, remoulded. The prisoner, freed, finds himself in a new world. . . .

But nothing of that sort appeared to have taken place. It seemed as if everything tremendous had happened already, before Napoleon's star had risen, and set. Spain was at peace, like her neighbours. Perroguet could not be interested to learn that Charles X had been crowned King of France at Rheims. No Charles X could be as the Emperor Napoleon. How flat, how tawdry a substitution !—No wars, he asked, no victories, nothing ?—No,

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nothing had happened that they knew of. At last the innkeeper, a man of great information, came out with the fact that he had heard of the death of Goethe. This shook Perroguet for a moment ; he had felt a love for him, the singer. So Reineke Fuchs was dead ! Well, well, all men must die. But he, Perroguet, was alive !

As if, at last, he realised this for the first time, a wave of deep thankfulness swept through him.

He lifted his glass. " My friends, let me drink you a toast. A happy ending of troubles ! And a farewell, too. For now again I am strong, I am a man, I must take the road once more. We all have our goals, and I have mine. Friendship, and a happy ending ! "

They all drank, they rose, they departed. The pigs and the hens had quietened down for the night. Perroguet helped the innkeeper to lock up.

" Mesonero," he said, " tomorrow I must go. You remember what I asked you when I came here. Have you been able to discover for me what you promised ? In what direction, after leaving here, went the Circo of Lopez ? "

The innkeeper looked at him in amazement. " Truly, in spite of everything, your confinement has addled your wits. You speak as if you thought it was still just round the corner. Certainly I have made enquiries, as you asked me, but what could be discovered ? Many, many troupes have been here since, but that one never again. By this time it may be hundreds of miles away, in some other country. On the other hand, by this time, as I told you before, it may no longer exist."

The next morning he was equally dubious. " I quite understand your desire to go back to your old employment, but why insist on one particular company ? There are scores of circuses travelling the roads. It may take you years to find the one you seek. You won't be able to travel except on your feet ; in any case you are hardly fit to earn your living in the open. Why not stay hereabouts for a few months until your strength wholly returns ? However, I see you are set on it. Well, I wouldn't advise you to go north at this season, there's

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only one course for you ; turn your face to the east and follow the skyline."

Perroquet was overcome with delighted surprise. The words seemed to him a miraculously good omen.

He strode forth with great happiness, to pick up his life again, and above all, and first, to find Hili.

Almost at once, however, a disappointing realisation came upon him. His strength, indeed, was still very little, and cruelly curtailed his journeyings. Even with the staff, which now he was obliged to use, he made little headway over the interminable, badly surfaced roads. Whenever he could he begged a lift in a country cart. Thus slowly he progressed from village to village. Though he found his voice was now too stiff to sing, he carried still the precious wallet of his lays. It was curious to reflect that at last, when he could not use it, he did not need it. For so often had he fingered those songs during his loneliness that now he knew them by heart : yes, now, at last, if he had wished, he could have boasted truthfully of his memory. But he had the flute ; on this he still could play. This earned him a little on the roads, and the Alcalde's money was not yet finished.

Wherever he went he asked for news of the Circus. But it was as the innkeeper had said, no one remembered having heard of it in those parts.

Yet daily he felt, in his inner mind, that he was nearing it. A snail, too, goes slowly, but it crosses the road in the end. A quiet optimism filled him.

And at length, freedom, sunshine and the use of his limbs began to send beating again through his body the true, generous pulse of nature. The years fell from him. His spine straightened, his bowed shoulders broadened, the flesh began to creep back on to his bones ; the rain and the wind and the sun bronzed his face again with their cheerful dye. He would always be gaunt and lean, but at least he had returned to the living.

Yes, that was what had hurt him most in the dungeon—being cut off from the living. But now he was knit up once more : the broad lands under his feet, the arching

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skies overhead, these alone joined him to the rest of the world. Even a sunset or a shower of rain linked him with Hili. For who knew she might not have seen it too ? The clouds that spilt now might have gathered their dews near her. Her face was ever before him, in every aspect of day and evening. Each bird and tree recalled something of her. He remembered her absurd little sayings—how the knotty flushed bark of the eucalyptus resembled exactly Perro's face after shaving . . . how the pepper-trees' long straggling branches of pink berries would do for her beautifully instead of a new frock . . . her ecstatic joy when first she had seen the frosted silver of the dwarf oak. . . . He hardly missed her presence, his thoughts and his hopes were so busy with her.

Over his calm, laborious journeying the winter and the summer passed without any incident : and then suddenly something happened that heartened him exceedingly.

III

He had made it a practice to turn aside, wherever he was, to attend any fair in the neighbourhood, thinking that in these places he was more likely to obtain the kind of news he sought.

One day, when he had walked since dawn without meeting a soul, he was pleased to see a countryman coming towards him. He was always glad to meet a wayfarer, and today, in particular, the desertion of the roads seemed to indicate something of interest going on elsewhere.

"Excuse me," he began, as usual, "have you seen a circus of any sort pass this way lately ?" (He had long since given up asking for Lopez's Circus by name ; the village folk never noticed or remembered the name of any proprietor.)

The man stared. He was a yokel of the poorest kind ; he seemed hardly able to understand. He took off his hat and scratched his head. Then he yawned, crossing his mouth hastily to prevent the devil jumping down his throat.

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"I do not know," he said at last.

"Well, perhaps that's a difficult question. Is there any celebration, or—or festivity, going on in the neighbourhood?"

The man took off his hat again and scratched his head once more. This time instead of speaking he sneezed.

"Jesus!" said Perroguet politely.

"Muchas gracias!" responded the other, according to custom.

Having said this he began to move on again, seeming to think he had answered the question.

Perroguet hesitated. Clearly this idiotic man could tell him little. Better to ask another. But would another pass on this road where only one had yet been seen?—At the last moment something made Perroguet run back after him. As he caught him up he had another idea. Perhaps the peasant had not even understood those long words. He spoke now very slowly, in the simplest tongue. "Is there a fair, a feria, in this village?"

He waited: expecting the man this time, no doubt, to cough or spit. . . .

To his surprise, the yokel, after a little consideration, answered slowly: "A fair is being held for three days in the village of Priedo."

"Ho, ho! Where is this village? How far away?"

But the man was evidently incapable of more: he pointed over his shoulder to the south-west, turned on his way again and shambled off.

Perroguet turned too. He was pleased, he was delighted.

He struck out across country in the direction indicated, and in spite of the tiring and difficult passage, he was rewarded ere nightfall by the winking lights on the common, and the familiar tinny blast of the band that revealed the presence of the fair.

It was very late when finally he reached it. Even the last of the fair-goers had departed, and the men were busy putting up their stalls. Well, it didn't matter. There was tomorrow. Just as he was turning away an extra-

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ordinary feeling came over him. In the darkness, from behind a tent, a slinking figure had passed. Close to the wall, hugging the shadows, it had moved, swiftly : a low shuffling form at its heels. He stared. It was already lost in the dim spaces of the common. But in his mind some memory stirred. Something six-legged. He could not recall it.

A little unsettled by this occurrence, and altogether worn out by his walk of many miles, he spent his night in the stable of a farm-house near the fair-ground. But in the morning, entirely refreshed, he visited the booths and tents, glad of the chance to look at them before the mass of the crowd arrived.

It was a large fair, a conglomeration of cheap-jacks and pedlars, from all parts of the country, selling almost every commodity that can be sold, from peppermints to expensive jewellery. A keen pleasure visited him on finding himself in this place, crowded with memories of the past, of old friends, of happy times. Here was so much that was delightful and familiar—the man who showed you how to fill up moth-holes in your old doublet, so that it passed as new ; the man who sold the elixir that made hair curl for ever after one dose ; the birds that told fortunes ; the stall where false hair, butter, and old books were sold, equally, by the pound. Here were the lemonade-tents, brightly striped, within which the explosions of the new drink could be heard continuously, like muffled thunder : here were the caravans of the gingerbread sellers, painted, in their tradition, with bright pink wheels and roof, and green windows filled with rows of stiff Valenciennes lace. Ranged up at the sides were the booths where you paid to see some phenomenon, a fat woman, or a two-headed dog, or a set of marionettes reproducing the latest sensational murder. And among them all, of course, were the contortionists and jugglers and acrobats. To each of them, patiently, Perroguet put his question. He looked at them attentively, too. But he could not perceive anyone he had known when with the Circus.

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All day he hung about, enjoying everything, unable to tear himself away, among the ever-increasing crowds.

During the afternoon a disturbance was caused at one of the book-stalls by an angry gentleman from the town protesting against the public sale of Bibles. "Scandalous! Disgraceful!" he fumed, "publishing this book in Spanish, for anyone to read! But what can one do without proper legislation? As for me, I buy every Spanish Bible I can get hold of and put it in the fire!" The salesman at the book-stall thereupon sold him his entire stock of Bibles, and the gentleman departed, well satisfied, presumably to burn them. The salesman was satisfied, too. The feelings of their translator, could he have known of this, were less discernible.

From this interesting scene Perroquet turned in time to hear a voice bawling from the platform outside the next-door tent.

"Just about to begin!" yelled the man in his practised way. "Just about to be shown! The world's most astounding and entirely unique exhibition! See this astonishing and almost incredible phenomenon! Princess Patapalouski, the Pig-Faced Lady from Central Russia! Step this way, step up, step up! Do not miss this amazing opportunity! Nothing like it has ever been seen before! The perfectly genuine, well-born, highly connected, and deeply tragical Pig-Faced Lady! Just about to begin!"

Unable to resist this appeal, Perroquet turned to the tent. He paid a coin and entered.

A crowd was there already, the heat was intense: he had to peer over the heads in front of him to see at all. At the other end was a platform with a red velvet curtain before it embroidered magnificently with a gold crown. The curtain fell in rich impressive folds, everyone's eyes were glued to it. It shook a little once or twice, giving an exciting sense of life behind. At last the man from the front of the tent (seeing his net was full) came up through the audience and sprang on to the platform.

"What you are about to see, Ladies and Gentlemen, is

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truly one of the wonders of History ! I beg you, however, in the name of humanity, not to make any loud demonstration at the sight of this unfortunate lady, whose feelings, through her many tragical experiences, are still very tender."

The curtain drew away to one side.

Seated at a table, in a stiff, spreading dress of dark silk, with a large bouquet at her bosom, fixed with a majestic jewel, and on her head a huge mob-cap trimmed with ribbons, feathers and pompoms, sat an extraordinary being. It was not so much that her face was not human, but that it was only too human, in an animal way. For her eyes were dark and beautifully painted, her eyebrows curved over them immaculately, her flat checks were stained a delicate crimson ; while thrusting itself forth between them was her muzzle, broad, brown and firm, bearing the long under-jaw and the wet, rounded nostrils of a beast. About this snout, too, there was something peculiar. . . . A deep, diagonal crack ran across it. . . . Below her mob-cap, at each side, a fluff of well-dressed brown hair showed itself. A pig-faced lady indeed !

The showman was talking. "Allow me to introduce to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Princess Patapalouski ! Yes, you have guessed right. This lady is of royal blood. Yet the misfortunes of her family have been such that she can hardly endure to recall them. She is, alas, now the sole surviving member of her distinguished line. Is that not so, your Royal Highness ? " He turned towards her.

A vast upheaval seemed to agitate that broad, strange form. The stiff silk rustled under her emotion. The lady's lips widened into a condescending smile, but from her throat came only a hoarse, short sound of assent.

"Ah ; you observe ! It is the tragedy of the century ! This lady, through her undeserved sufferings, has lost the proper use of her vocal chords. She is lucky, only, that she is still alive. Her elder brother, who was in the National Guard of the Emperor of Russia, lost his life in battle at an early age. Her second brother, who served also in a famous regiment, fell at Smolensko. Her sisters

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suffered misfortunes too terrible to relate ! They were all, of course,—well,—how shall I put it without hurting the delicate feelings of Her Highness ? Let us say that she alone of the family displayed the facial peculiarities that you cannot fail to have observed. Is that not so, your Royal Highness ? ”

Again the gratified smile ; again the hoarse rumble.

“ Observe, too, this poor lady is obliged always to wear white kid gloves. This is because her hands were so cruelly frost-bitten during the memorable winter of 1812. For she was captured—yes, my friends, she was captured by the perfidious Buonaparte, and forced to accompany him during his retreat,—strictly, of course, let me hasten to say, as a prisoner-of-war ! The Princess would never have permitted any liberties, even from the Emperor. Her views, I may say, are exceedingly rigid in matters of propriety. Only too frequently in the past has she had occasion to deplore the moral laxity of the First Empire (that was, of course, before she lost her voice) ; and she still looks with marked disfavour on any irregularities of conduct among the young. At the same time, you must not think her nature harsh or unsympathetic. No, no, on the contrary, she has a large heart . . . a large heart, and an enormous appetite. . . . ”—Here a moment’s disquiet appeared to seize the speaker. It seemed as if his own heart, only too frankly, had spoken. Quickly he recovered himself.

“ In the daily pursuits of life, Princess Patapalouski takes an interest. You will be shown, as you go out, a piece of knitting done entirely by her own hands. She is very fond of reading, too, her favourite books are histories and tales of love. Alas, here we touch on a delicate subject. Owing to the loss of her betrothed in early youth, the Princess has ever preferred to remain single. Well, who shall dictate to the heart of a woman ? Especially a Royal one ! Yet this has not soured her life. In the matter of jokes and humour, and mirth-provoking incidents, the Princess is never lacking in appreciation. Is that not so, your Highness ? ”

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The long lips curled and lifted, an expression of happiness transfixed itself upon them ; the white-gloved hands patted together and a commotion again began to stir the wide-spreading skirts.

" Yes, the Princess is always ready to be amused," continued the speaker hurriedly ; " her feelings, in the face of all the sorrows she has endured, give us all, I am sure, a valuable example. That, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the genuine and truthful story of Princess Patapalouski or the Pig-Faced Lady. We must not tire her. Thank you, thank you. Don't forget to look at the knitting as you go out."

But Perroquet stood, unable to move. A huge, ungraspable revelation was hovering over him. He felt like one holding his breath, waiting to sneeze. . . . Where, at what time, had he seen those eyes, that face, above all, that nose with the crack so strangely across it ? . . . He recalled, for no reason, the shuffling form of the night before. . . .

A pig-faced lady. That bright, ingenuous, unmistakable smile. ' Here I am, amuse me ! '—Of course ! It was Suki.

The rôle suited her to perfection.

How he laughed, Perroquet ! He went out of the tent and he leant against the post at the entrance and he laughed till he felt helpless. The proprietor came out and cursed him away.

He went, but he didn't go far. He knew it was no good searching, the secret would be too well kept. He hung about all the evening until darkness set in. Even after the people had gone, and the booths were closed, he waited. Sure enough, at last, from behind a tent, a slinking figure emerged, a low shadow beside it.

Perroquet stepped towards him. At once the man checked, froze into stillness, and then cautiously began to retreat into the darkness beside the tent. Evidently he had no wish to be observed while taking his charge for an airing.

Perroquet went after him. " Pardon me, my good sir. Excuse me pursuing you thus. But you happen to have

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with you a dear, a very dear old friend of mine. Yes, yes, I know what I am talking about. I understand all. I am referring to the Princess—that is, to the Pig-Faced—in short, to the bear Suki."

With one swift glance the man turned to fly. In the same instant he seemed to realise that by doing so he would only more fully expose the animal that followed him on a chain.

"Do not fear," said Perroguet, "your secret is safe with me. I find it a charming, a fascinating, a wholly enjoyable one. I, too, am a professional, I quite comprehend how these deceptions have to be. My only wish is to greet again one whom I knew well in the past."

The man hesitated, in extreme surprise. "How could you know this?" he said.

As if the object in question could throw some light on the mystery, he turned round and looked at her.

At first, among the shadows, no more than Suki's shaggy outline was visible. Perroguet threw himself down beside her. What a pleasure it was to find her again! She wasn't much altered. The shaving of her face merely enhanced her quaint characteristic expression: she bore her age well, nothing showed of it but the greying of her flanks and a certain matronly corpulency.

Perroguet put his arms round her neck and hugged her. At once she drew herself back: a man's passing lantern flashed her face before him, the picture of offended dignity. She glanced at her master, as if in protest, and to demand protection. At that moment some scent caught her memory: she lifted her nose towards Perroguet, turning her head round till she seemed near to twisting it off; all at once she appeared satisfied; with a little choking snuffle she thrust herself forward into his caress; and so she stood, swaying and shivering with pleasure, as his long fingers rubbed the strong fur at her neck.

A flood of joy engulfed him. Here was a friend again, and one, too, who knew him. "May I—would you allow me—I mean, it would be such a pleasure to me if I might have her to myself for a short while—let me take her for

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her walk this evening ! The stalls aren't all shut up yet. I'll get her some candy-sugar, or honey, if possible. I'd get her anything ! I know her tastes well."

" What do you take me for ? A fool ? Quite enough ways of having things stolen without giving one's consent beforehand ! "

" I assure you, you are mistaken. This is merely a matter of personal affection. I have no intention of——"

" Whatever your intention, you won't get the chance ! Do you think I don't know every show in Europe would give its soul to have this old bear ? "

Perroguet called Heaven to witness the purity of his motive.

Suki had sat down calmly on her haunches. As usual, she enjoyed a discussion : she looked now solemnly from one to the other, as if unable, on her part, to decide between them. The man tugged at her chain several times without being able to make her budge. At last, turning her back on him, she lifted her eyes gravely to Perroguet, as if (quite without bias, of course) her convictions obliged her to decide in favour of the candy.

" You see, she *wants* to come with me," cried Perroguet, delighted. " Dear Suki ! Come, give me the chain. I'll take good care of your Princess Pig-face, I assure you ! "

" And I assure *you*," returned the man, evidently realising he had already gone too far, " that I don't know what you are talking about ! This animal, whose name is Pierre, is simply a pet of one of the showmen's children. Unfortunately he has had a skin disease of the face. That is the only reason why he does not go out by daylight."

He pulled the chain again. Suki rose at once to her feet. With a resigned dignity, as if acknowledging the necessary incogniti of Royalty, she prepared to follow her master ; yet at the last moment Perroguet thought he perceived a little unquenchable disappointment in her eye.

" Never mind, old girl !" he managed to whisper. " I'll watch where they keep you and come and see you tomorrow."

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The next morning, though he found the place where he guessed she must live, he could get no chance to visit her unseen. The afternoon's performance was over before he could keep his promise. By watching it closely, however, he was able to discover something that had puzzled him. When an answer was required from her Royal Highness, the showman, leaning over the gilded chair behind her, prodded her secretly in the back with a stick, thus giving her the signal for self-expression. As Suki's natural form of this was a gratified smile and a conversational outburst, no wonder her part fitted her temperament as cleverly as the white kid gloves that concealed her claws. The ingenious simplicity of this thing delighted Perroguet beyond measure.

At last, in the early evening, he found the coast clear. He crept up to the pen, calling her name gently, so that she might be warned. Finding no opening, he squeezed himself in under the canvas; and there in her little dwelling he had a pleasant conversation with her. She was certainly comfortable enough in there. Water, straw, even an old tin to play with. Many a bear has less. She had no bonds: nor even any fleas. It was clear her master was fond of her, and proud of her too, and had confidence in her sense and judgment. 'And so have I, my dear Suki,' thought Perroguet, 'for here you can live in this good nest you have made for yourself, until you die calmly of old age.' He watched her enjoy his gifts, marvelling at her unaltered ardour of youth: her cheeks, still crimson from the afternoon, gave her a fantastic look of a young girl. All the same, missing teeth make slow work, he mustn't be caught there, he dared not stay too long. He thrust the rest of his offerings into her den, and with many good wishes withdrew.

If the Princess Patapalouski at the next performance appeared to have a particularly husky voice, to show a deplorable tendency to lick her chops with grateful reminiscence, and worse than all, to throw her arms about and to roll in her chair in a state of happiness ill-fitting the tale of her sorrows, this was, after all, no less

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than could be expected of one who had engorged so recently several pounds of honey, a dozen ginger-bread cakes, a complete tin of barley-sugar, and two large bottles of beer.

This chance meeting with Suki gave Perroguet much encouragement. It seemed to bring his reunion with Hili measurably nearer.

If the world is so small, he argued, that I can run across an animal whom I parted from so long ago, whom I am not even seeking, at a fair that by the veriest chance I attended (he remembered his difficulties with the peasant), how simple it will be to find her for whom I seek always.

If only he was younger ! He, like Suki, was hampered by years. Yet he must, like her, adapt himself to the fortunes that befell him ; and like her he must conquer them in the end. Who would have guessed, finding her almost dead in the snow, that the proud and happy life of a Royal Princess was to be hers ; that it was stretching before her, secretly, all the time ?

Yes, hope lived always in this wonderful world. One must never listen to doubts. One must think only of the bright chances. After all, and in spite of what the Spanish innkeeper had said, there weren't many circuses upon the roads. Surely, if he travelled patiently everywhere, he could meet, in time, every one of them ? What obstacles could France, Spain, Portugal, even all Europe, offer to determination ?

Encouraged by Suki's example, he felt strong enough to ransack the whole world, if necessary, for the Cirque Lopez.

CHAPTER XXVIII

I

BUT all of a sudden evil days had fallen on the Cirque Lopez.

Being one of those that seldom retired into winter quarters, the comfort of its company was naturally largely controlled by the season and the weather.

For this reason, hitherto, the tours had always been arranged to allow the Circus to travel through the winters in the warm climates of the south, reserving colder regions for summer months. This necessitated, of course, some far-sighted planning, so as to obtain in time the required permission from towns before any rival entertainment had captured the site. It now became apparent how much of these arrangements had been effected by the invaluable Kranz.

For the Circus now sometimes found itself, to its misery, stuck in the hottest districts at the most sultry part of the year, when it was distressing to be under canvas and to endure the crowds : at other times it could not visit at all some favourite city because the only free ground near enough to the town had already been booked for all the fêtes. When this happened Lopez was always indignant ; he felt as if fortune had offered him a personal affront.

At last, however, she seemed to offer him a personal triumph. On his northern circuit, he succeeded, to his joy and surprise and without any difficulty, in obtaining a superb site near a large, prosperous town.

Arrived here, the Circus at once began to make arrangements for a full fortnight's display. The town was plastered with notices ; the crier and the first Parade went through all the streets ; and in the Big Top itself

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all available benches and planking were set up to accommodate the expected throng.

Alas, the very morning that the Circus was to open, rain began to fall in that concentrated, unhurrying manner that threatens prolonged continuance.

"Why should this happen to *me*?" cried Lopez, as if there were a conspiracy against him. "It never happened thus before."

Any local inhabitant could have told him that travellers always avoided the southern side of these ranges at that season.

But there was nothing to be done. The Circus must play, money was needed. The season had been all too unprofitable already: perhaps, too, the weather might turn.

Each day Lopez looked at the heavens, hoping to see a clearing. Up from the south the dark clouds sailed continuously, covering the whole sky: they touched the rocky hills and broke into a mist: a little wind, eddying, shepherded the water into a steady flood upon the town.

The people crouched over their fires within doors, few seemed tempted to make the journey over the boggy soil to see the Show at their gates. Yet poor as the audiences were, Lopez felt he must continue: he knew well the soul-numbing misery that falls upon artistes who cannot perform. Besides, the site was paid for, he could not lose that money. Thus the Acts were gone through daily before the half-empty benches, to the accompaniment of the coughing and sneezing of the audience. A more lugubrious entertainment could hardly be imagined.

And meanwhile the rain continued.

The discomfort of the circus-folk was extreme. Lopez had lighted braziers set up here and there on the ground, but they were useless, for they were quenched at once to a smoulder of smoke that gave no heat. The acrobats and the ponies waiting for their turns were sometimes soaked through before they entered the ring. The cold and the damp crept in under the canvas of the tents; even those with double roofings could not keep out the

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rain, which filled the whole air within with a dim, invisible moisture. Everything that was touched seemed cold and clammy, everything hung limply, heavy with damp. The fresh smell of trodden wet grass, which first had pervaded the ground, gave way now to the overpowering breath of soaked canvas, and the sour, chemical odour of earth churned into slime.

Those without beds found it was impossible to keep warm at night, the cold struck up from the soil through straw, blankets, and mats. The caravan-dwellers were better off, their floors at least were dry. The rain shot off their roofs in a circular avalanche, so that they looked as if they lived in a house of glass.

All day, men, dripping with wet, went round loosening the guy-ropes of the tents, or pushing poles against the bellies of water collecting in the canvas tops. In spite of all their care it seemed impossible to keep the pegs fast in the slushy soil, especially when the weight of the wet canvas strained the contracting ropes. The roof that sheltered the monkeys' dwelling was pulled half off one evening after dark, letting in a deluge of accumulated water over their shrinking forms ; and though this was discovered before long, and rectified, the monkeys had received a severe chill and soon began to develop coughs and colds.

But that was not the only piece of bad luck.

Owing either to the excessive, unnatural rainfall, or to the cold, or to the damp, or to the sunlessness, an illness arose in the town, whence it was soon carried to the Circus. Here, for once, the circus-people's usual immunity from infection did not help them. Indeed it seemed, rather, as if their soaked, exhausted, shivering bodies eagerly welcomed the disease.

Everyone became ill. Their throats ached, their eyes and noses ran water, their limbs were full of pain, an extreme cold numbed their joints : at the same time they felt burning with heat and their heads throbbed like an engine.

This malady, which by now was raging all through the

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city, appeared at first sight trivial enough, a child's fever of the spring ; but one could think that no longer when people died.

Rumours of these deaths were brought out by those who visited the town to purchase supplies. The shops were being left empty, they said, some had closed up altogether ; in some families every member was sick, with none to attend on the other ; the streets were deserted, the people were flocking to the Churches to implore the kind help of the Madonna.

In the Circus it was no longer a case of providing entertainments for the public. The public had their hands full with their own troubles. The last half-bills which Lopez had been able to devise from the Acts of those performers who were still capable of giving them had been attended by less than a dozen persons. In any case, the number of sick in the Circus itself now began to increase daily.

All idea of performances having been abandoned, Lopez gave up the main tent for the use of these sufferers. Its shelter was the most weather-proof of any, and owing to its size, lighted braziers could be placed within it without danger of fire. Besides this, the benches used by audiences could be lashed together to form beds, which at least raised their occupants above the soil. Some degree of comfort and warmth was thus obtained, and the cold and dampness forced a little to retreat ; but the acrid fumes of the smoke from the braziers seemed at last to increase headaches and the difficulty of breathing through choked throats.

Those who had as yet been spared had now the entire burden of fighting the rain as well as supplying all the wants of their fellows. Food and fuel, milk, vegetables, meat for the lions and forage for the horses had to be fetched from the town almost daily. Men staggered from their beds to tend their animals. Unable to enjoy their accustomed exercise the ponies kicked and fidgeted in their stalls, their bellies swelled with the damp hay their coats grew lifeless and staring. Fortunately Nord-

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sig remained on his feet ; he laboured from morning to night, not only to relieve the sufferings of his own cats but to defeat the inroads of the wet throughout the animal lines.

Lopez was distracted. To pack up and go was impossible : there were not enough able-bodied men left to load and drive the wagons, supposing it were even practicable to place the sick in them. Even those who had the malady slightly were so weak that they could scarcely drag themselves about. In any case, how far would heavy wagon-wheels get in the knee-deep mud of the valley roads, beyond which whole rivers descended the sides of hills ? No, all he could do was to drive into the town imploring the aid of doctors for his stricken company. The doctors were rushed off their feet already, attending to the epidemic. At last one of them actually found time to come out to the circus-ground and feel pulses and give orders for foods and potions.

By this time the cook had been taken ill. The cooking was done by volunteers, each day a new one, as the fever seized a fresh victim. Dishes of extraordinary composition were carried through the pouring rain to the tents. It made no difference, the sick could not eat.

Then one of the circus-children died—an infant of a few months. After her, two others, the tumbling boys of the second Act. Then Gaugin, the old groom, who had hustled about with his cheerful brown face from the beginning of the trouble, doing the work of two, suddenly succumbed, and died next day. It grieved Lopez inexpressibly to lose this faithful servant who had been with him since he first owned the Circus. Then Elsa, the strong girl from the Pyramid, whose nursing had been invaluable, collapsed in her tent and could do no more. There were few enough now to attend to the sick. The good nuns who had come out from the town, two at a time, to give their assistance, were now overwhelmed with other duties : all day they went from bed to bed, sometimes only in time to give a few words of comfort and a prayer. The disorder in the town was of a much

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more severe character, people were dying on all sides; many nuns themselves were ill, they could no longer come out to the Circus. At last there were only half a dozen people left to do all duties—to cook, to feed the animals, to fetch supplies, and to look after the patients. Finally Lopez managed to secure the services of an old nurse from the town, one who professed herself to be experienced in every illness, and triumphantly he brought her out to the camp.

It was his last action that day: an hour later he, too, was stretched on his bed in his caravan, racked with pains in the joints, shivering with cold and burning with fever.

Hili attended him. She, Nordsig, Madame Antonio (the slack-rope dancer) and a few others had still escaped the infection. They were glad of the presence of old Margarita and the confidence her trained knowledge gave them. Even so it was a case of being up all day and most of the night; some of the patients threw their blankets off continually or even tried to get out into the rain saying their Act was just about to commence. Senhor Lopez was fretful as a child. After the first day he would have none but Hili near him, yet even from her he frequently refused to take his medicine, and caused her to reheat his soups and gruels many times before he would swallow them. He complained bitterly about everything she did and particularly because she did not stop the people who were bumping the caravan about, and who would certainly receive their dismissal the first thing next morning.

II

And then suddenly, one day, though nothing seemed different, everyone began to get better. They stretched their limbs, they opened their eyes, they seemed to wake up weakly, out of a dream. Lopez, though still pale, looked intently at Marie-Céleste when she entered with his breakfast broth, and all at once he seemed to realise that he had been ill, and that now he was well, and that

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he owed her a debt, and not he only, but the whole of the Circus. "She is an angel, a veritable angel!" he cried in a sort of weak excitement to the doctor when he came.

"Or shall we say, in other words, a competent nurse?" said the doctor, smiling. He, too, was delighted at the signs of a general recovery. He had had little rest for many nights.

A wave of convalescence almost as tangible as a solid thing swept through the camp. There was still plenty to be done, for the sick could not yet look after themselves, nevertheless a general feeling of release was abroad.

Even Nordsig, who had kept going like an automaton, relaxed at last, sitting in the canteen-tent, his round fur cap at the back of his head, his long legs stretched before him, eating and drinking with the first enjoyment he had felt since the epidemic began. Even the rain had stopped, there had been none for two days. If it came on again (for the sky still looked threatening) Barthold could see to the guy-ropes, he, Nordsig, had done it every night so far! . . . How pleasant it was to feel the strain was over, nothing ahead but peace and recovery. Well, it was a true saying, all bad things come to an end. He would finish his supper, have a last look at the big cats, and turn in for a real good sleep.

One or two others dropped in to the tent. Instead of being stiff, silent, and anxious, everyone now seemed to have become reminiscent, convivial, or reflective. "Hey, old mother," cried Nordsig, grinning, to Margarita, "your duties will soon be over!"

"My duties are never over, darling," said old Margarita sadly. "As long as there's life on this earth there's illness and death also."

Old Margarita hobbled along to Hili's tent. The girl was there, her fair head bent over some task: she seemed white and worn, these days had taxed her heavily, but she glanced up at once with her look of unchanging serenity.

"Rest a little, darling," said old Margarita. "There

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is not much more to be done this evening. You look altogether worn out."

"Yes. I think I will rest, perhaps, mother. I feel strange tonight. Sad, and happy too, without any reason. I feel as if something were going to happen. Tell me, you who have lived so long, you who have seen so many come into life and go away into death, is it true that a knowledge of what is to come sometimes passes into one? People have thought of me that I could tell the future. Can it be, for the first time, I can feel my own?"

"Why do you ask, girl? What are you thinking?"

"I don't know, mother. I cannot describe my feelings. Perhaps it is all this illness, and tiredness, and fear, now passed over. . . . I was filled with happiness before you came in. I was thinking of my life. Sad things have happened to me but I have not been made sad. Not sad for long. Yet now all at once I feel near tears, and yet as if, too, a dear one were close to me. . . . Can it be in my heart I hear again the voice of my lover?"

"My darling, it is not the love of a lover that brings tears to women. I have lived long among the world's tears, I know them all. The illness of the child, my darling, the longing and the ache for the child that doesn't come, or for the child that doesn't stay. The husband, known for many years, great and noble heart, not valued by the world. The parting with the sons when they go to war, so young, so gallant. The daughters who meet in their hour and in their brave ignorance the pangs of the future. These are the tears of women. Perhaps, also, a little, for that figure never known, never seen, that lives always in the secret hearts of women, the young lover of their dreams."

"Yes. I think I alone, of all, have had the young lover of my dreams."

"Well, dream again, darling. You are young still. You are dreadfully tired. Look, lie down, sleep. It is late. Everyone is sleeping. And take comfort. Perhaps he will come back to you."

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"No, mother. You don't understand. He is dead.—And I must not stay here. Why, see, how could I have forgotten? Sitting here and talking and letting it get later. I have never forgotten it any evening before. I must take the Senhor his broth."

"You cannot go out now. It is pouring with rain. Hark, can't you hear it thrashing on the canvas! And there goes the wind. What a night! It is pitch-dark too, and nearly eleven. The Senhor is better, he will excuse you, perhaps he is asleep."

"I must go, mother. I have never failed him, he will be wanting it."

"Take the lantern at least. An old woman does not need it."

"What, Margarita? Do you think I don't know my way blindfold across this Circus-ground by now?"

How dark it was outside. The rain made one wet through in a moment. The wind was strong too, it was blowing hard. The ground was slippery underfoot, it had caked a little on top with the dry days, now it was all slush again. What a pity the rain had returned. Still, it could do no harm, now. The crisis was past, everyone was recovering. There would be no new infection, Margarita said. Oh, how tired one felt! Here was the end of the tents. . . . Here at last, just beyond, the Senhor's caravan. It was quite quiet and dark, only its squared outline showed it in the dimness, and the sound on its boards of the driving rain.—Open the door, hush, listen. . . . The Senhor was asleep, after all. The broth would be wasted.

Well, never mind, shut the door quietly, not to disturb him. After all, sleep was good, he must be much better; soon he would be walking about, shouting at everyone, as excitable as before.

Now she must find her way back. . . . If Perro could have seen him sometimes, how he would have laughed. Not unkindly, of course, but just because he was jolly and liked laughing. Yes, Perro always liked the Senhor, it was he himself who had engaged him. How long ago

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that seemed. How dark it was. There wasn't a light anywhere. Strange the watchman wasn't even about. He was still ill, of course, someone else had been taking his place. Or perhaps no one had been taking his place, everything was upset, there was no one to give orders. Well, that would soon be all right.—Against the wind it seemed longer going back, the wind pressed so strongly. The mud sucked at one's shoes. The rain poured, like a cold moving hand, down one's face. The memory of those anxious days, and of that ceaseless rain, would remain with one for ever. . . .

What was that huge shadow suddenly so near, overhead? Could it be the old stores-tent? Hadn't she passed that yet? Why—it was shifting. Falling! Coming down on her! Help!—Where could she fly? It was pitch-dark everywhere.—Oh! too late—

A huge blackness swooping out of the sky towards her. A flapping of canvas, an angry scream of torn cloth. Folds of something wrapping and beating around her. Then crash! a blow like the end of the world. Then darkness. Nothing more.

"What was that?" said Nordsig, rising on his elbow in bed. He listened. There was no more noise than the whining of the wind and the rushing sound of the rain. On its voice a sudden fear seized him. Could it possibly be that? . . . Had Barthold forgotten, after all? Well, he must go and see, at once.

He lighted a lantern and went out into the wet darkness.

After a little he found which tent it was that had been blown down. It sprawled on the sodden ground, lashed with rain, a mass of canvas and ropes and pegs uprooted from the soil; the huge centre-pole had come down too, it lay splintered with the fall of its own weight: and suddenly Nordsig heard himself screaming for help. . . .

They lifted Hili away from the wreckage and carried her to her tent. Old Margarita still squatted there, her head sunk between her shoulders, her hands hanging before her. She moved quietly at the sound of voices and opened the tent-flap to admit the bearers. Hili was

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white and quite motionless, but still breathing. "Shall we fetch Lopez?" asked Nordsig, his voice trembling in his uncontrollable distress. The light of the lantern glistened on his wet, distracted features.

"Yes, you can kill him too, if you like, bringing him from a sick-bed through this storm. No, put her down carefully. Let us see what is the matter."

For two hours she watched beside the still form. How small it looked, like a child's, lying under the rug. She was sad, old Margarita, she had seen too much.

In the early morning, before it was light, Hili opened her eyes. She looked clearly at the old woman. Margarita bent over her; she saw at once it was the end. Between long pauses, but quite clearly, Hili spoke.

"What happened, mother? Did something hurt me?"

"Yes. You are hurt, darling. You must be brave."

"Why do you say that? I feel quite strong. Why do you look so strange?"

"My darling, your back is broken. You are not in pain. But soon you are going to die."

"Today, tomorrow, mother?"

"Today. Perhaps at once. Are you afraid?"

"No. I have never been afraid. I am quite content. I think I am glad, really. I shall meet many people I have wanted to meet. . . . My mother, who died of cold in a silly war. My father, whom I know nothing of. . . ."

"Darling, what can I do for you?"

"Thank you, mother—my little crucifix! I have had it all my life, since I was a baby. A kind peasant woman gave it me, Perro said. She said, 'Come back soon' . . . Oh, mother, promise to ask the Senhor to be kind always to my little son! . . . Bring the candle nearer, mother. Look, already it shines with the golden locks of Siegfried. Oh, Siegfried, my only love. . . . But, Perro, where are you? I want you too. Oh, Perro, will you too not come to me?"

"Hush, darling. Is it your son you call for?"

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" No, my son is happy. He cannot understand. Oh, mother, is it wicked to say he is happy who cannot understand ? Never mind. I am happy too. I am cold now ; it is dark, I can hardly see. . . . Why is there sunlight suddenly in this room ? "

Light as joy, she lived, she died.

CHAPTER XXIX

AND Hans remained with the Circus.
For a time he grieved for Hili as a puppy grieves for its mother — dumbly, instinctively, but not very deeply.

Already the Circus had taken him into its huge bosom. Whatever hearts break, whatever lives are crushed under its wheel, the cycle of the Circus goes on. Its children come or go, they rise, prosper, or fall ; in their place spring at once new voices, faces, new hopes, fears, ambitions : to these, as if the drama was starting again from the beginning, the Circus offers anew the same interest, detail, complexities of change and character. The track that goes round the world is narrow as a grass-blade : and it is always the same. Minds, hearts, nationalities, temperaments, all are swung along it ; linked together only by the rhythm of routine.

As soon as the company were fitted for the journey they moved from the scene of their troubles. The sun shone, the animals recovered, performances were given again amidst the full clang of publicity, applause, noise, colour, gaiety, the hurdy-gurdy hum of a pleasure-ground. Soon their recent misfortunes were forgotten by everybody.

But not by Lopez. Since the loss of Kranz, he had never been the same. The touring difficulties and financial straits, which now seemed always to surround him, appeared at times insurmountable ; the misfortune of the epidemic, the loss of old Gaugin, and finally the death of Marie-Céleste, caused him a bitter despondency. The sun, shining now when it was too late, seemed to become a personal enemy. He shook his fist at it,

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cursing. He grew more erratic and excitable and unbalanced daily : and while continually making contracts with new artistes for forthcoming tours, he announced at the same time to everybody his intention of retiring from the roads altogether, with the information that he had already entered into negotiations for a sale.

As to Hans, he was attached to him : in his queer, quarrelsome way he harboured a kindness for the orphan. To give him a *raison d'être* in the Circus and to pay for his keep, he began to allot the boy some simple tasks. For these he received no pay, but he had a nook to sleep in and he could eat his fill.

Indeed, all the circus-folk were kind to Hans. Partly from a common pity, partly because they had loved his mother, and partly because already his unusual qualities were coming to light.

For it began to be discovered that when you gave him an order, and he made no reply, and did not seem to understand, yet more often than not the thing would be done : and what was more, once it was done it would go on being done : as if the clock, wound up, could not cease ticking. Certainly, on occasions, this eccentricity was irritating, and led to errors, quarrels and blows : but in matters of routine, and for all dull, necessary, and continuous actions, it was found invaluable.

Thus, as time passed, his duties grew more varied and responsible, though still of the simplest nature. It became his job to hoist the flag called Hotel over the food-tent as soon as meals were ready ; so long as that flew all circus-people could be fed. Sitting on their long wooden benches, arranging themselves in an order of their own—(no animal trainers, for instance, would sit beside each other ; the Egyptian dancers took the head of the table, parading their precedence over the Cuban equilibrist, whom nobody could understand unless he brought his wife, a lemon-coloured girl of seventeen, who spoke a polyglot ; the circus-hands bunched themselves together at the lower end, speaking German)—they ate ravenously, their life giving good appetite. When the allotted

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time had elapsed,—and Hans, through some inner machinery, was seldom far out,—the flag came down, no more was procurable. Hans then retired behind the cooking-tent. Here he chopped meat. This was the remains of the midday meal, collected from all sources, that he chopped for the dogs' dinners. He chopped it on a wooden block in front of the wheel of a wagon, always the same place. If a chopped piece flew out between the spokes it was lost for ever. Sometimes he hung a shirt or a piece of canvas over the wheel: sometimes he did not bother. In the whole of the day this was his only concession to chance. His assistance in the cooking-tent was much valued by the cook and the stores-keeper: it was felt he could be relied upon not to divulge the pilferings of the food.

Besides this, at exactly the same time each evening he prepared the powdered resin for the ring-horses, and carried it in its wooden basin to the stables, putting it down always in the same corner. Then he went back to the canteen and fetched lard, and going thence to the dressing-tents he mixed the paint for the clowns' faces. The lard was heated in a tin cup over a candle and mixed with powdered zinc oxide. It might have been mud, mixed with water: he would have given it equal care, attention and indifference.

Finally, when the camp was struck, and the acrobats, the equestriennes, the trainers, all the élite of the profession, had departed with the first loads, Hans remained to help to clear up the litter and to follow afterwards with the odds and ends.

Nordsig, who felt Hans to be particularly his protégé, became quite proud of him. For Hans never wanted an hour off; Hans never idled, played, or gossiped. Indeed, he seldom spoke. And you could tell where he would be at any hour of the day or night. At last Nordsig, who had never forgotten the child's extraordinary interest in animals, or the queer influence he had seemed to have over them, began to believe that in this strange, silent creature might be hidden a talent which was at present

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being wasted on these haphazard duties. He had to go carefully, of course. Hans was no longer a young child with nothing to do but what he liked best. He was now a servant of the Circus, that is, of Lopez. It would not do to annex him entirely for his own calling: still, one never knew what might develop.

Thus Nordsig allowed Hans to go about with him among his lions as much as he liked. Finally, he even entrusted to him some of the minor duties of the cages. That was a proud moment for Hans. From that day he never failed in this task. At exactly the same time each day he arrived at the cages to swill them out with buckets of water and to poke fresh straw under the grid with a long rake.

His procedure was always the same. First, a kind of warning murmur to the cats, a wordless, guttural sound: then a steady, deft removal of the soiled straw from under the restless bodies and paws: then the sluicing of water over the boards, through which it dripped in rank yellow spirals to the ground: a few moments for all to drain away, then the raking of the fresh straw over. At the first sound of his voice the lions in each cage slunk back to its farthest limit, their round golden eyes turned towards him. "Come on now," they said, "we are all ready." When it was over they rolled on their backs among the clean trusses, sticking their four legs up playfully and licking their fur with their harsh tongues.

In the afternoons there was always a crowd of people hanging about the animals' cages, sometimes staring fearfully at them, sometimes merely listening to the cheap-jacks, and buying things from the stalls which sprang up alongside. (For Lopez did not object to these neighbours, they all brought grist to the mill.) But when the afternoons were specially hot, these dense crowds seemed to shut out all the air from the cages, within which the body-odour of ammonia became almost unbearable to the animals, giving them headaches, causing them to snarl, hiss, lie sulking in a corner, or range

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angrily from side to side, swishing their tails. On these occasions the very appearance of Hans, as he pressed his way towards them through the crowds, seemed to give them relief: between his welcome buckets they gazed at him eagerly, as if they could feel, coming forth from him, an animal understanding of their animal needs. This was so remarkable that sometimes even someone in the shifting crowds would observe it.

There was one man in particular, who seemed always there when the big animals were being attended to. Silent and unobtrusive, nobody noticed him. Even Hans, whom he watched so closely, was unaware of his continual presence.

But one afternoon, while engrossed in his tasks, Hans discovered that the stranger was speaking to him.

"What your pay for this, eh?" he asked in bad Flemish.

In spite of having blue eyes and fair hair, Hans did not understand Flemish.

He gazed at the intruder with his customary vacant stare, his empty bucket in one hand, his rake in the other. It was this look of Hans which, more than anything else, put the idea into the stranger's mind.

He strolled away and leant against a tent-pole, beside one of the girls from the Ballet, with whom he seemed already to have made some acquaintance.

"Who that boy, eh?" he began, this time in German.

The girl laughed. The man's queer, dark face was attractive. . . .

"Well, his name's Hans. Don't know any more."

"Any father, mother, eh?"

"No, they're dead, someone told me. I've heard his mother was French. No one knows really."

The stranger paused a moment. His glance caught up the girl's face as if holding it steadily to him by some personal charm.

"Lopez good, strong master, eh? Give you good contract? Have boy many years?"

"Oh, I don't know. Yes, the Senhor's quite good.

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Very kind, really. He keeps Hans on here doing odd jobs because he knows he's simple in the head."

"Where lion-training master now, eh?"

"What, Nordsig? Oh, he's away somewhere. He'll be back to-night. What a lot you want to know! You haven't asked anything about *me* yet." . . .

The next day the stranger spoke to Hans again. "What your pay for this, eh?" he asked in atrocious French. He spoke all languages, and none correctly.

"*Pay?*" asked Hans stonily, quite at sea.

The stranger's lip curled, a glinting triumph shone in his eye.

For the whole of the next week he came at Hans's cleaning-times and leant against the posts of the cages, watching and planning, and seeming to await some opportunity. . . .

Hans was as unconscious of him as before.

One dark evening, about half an hour before the performance was due to begin, a tremendous uproar broke out among the tents in which lived the lately imported Senegalese. Someone had stolen an amulet from the wife of the Chief, accusations were being flung out on all sides like poisoned spears, the entire families of the accused, with shrill cries, uttered their indignant denials. Attracted by the hubbub, the circus-people poured out of their tents, already dressed or partly dressed for their appearance in the Ring; at once they began to give their opinions, and their advice, to take sides, and to give judgment. Their shouts soon rivalled the angry yells of the blacks. Almost at once the matter became personal, voices rose louder than ever, insults were hurled, old grudges were reborn swiftly under the fierce light of the flares and the hot tumult of anger. Already the familiar crashing of glass was heard. Lopez rushed out from his caravan. It seemed to him as if this quarrel, fast developing into a colour-war, might turn into the sort of fight that had nearly wrecked the Circus years ago. And if not that, it would certainly completely ruin the performance so soon due to start.

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Hans was coming back from the lions' cages. He heard the babel only as a huge, confused roar, it meant nothing to him. Suddenly he saw a man strike out, a black shape rear itself against the shifting lights, he heard a woman scream, he saw a body crumple and fall. At that moment the figure of Lopez sprang into sight, gesticulating, cursing, shouting, stamping with rage and helplessness. And at the same instant there was the patter of running feet behind Hans, a quick clutch on his arm, and a voice, heard before, in his ears.

" You come with me, eh ? You look after big cats, eh ? I give you good pay."

The man was screaming at the top of his voice, in a third repetition of his words, before Hans could hear or understand.

When he did, from bewilderment he began to stammer.

" But—but—but—my master— The Senhor—"'

He couldn't collect his wits to go on.

" The Senhor knows," yelled the stranger. " He tells me already. He says he *want* you come with me."

" He said that ? " said Hans, unable to believe his ears. The solid ground he stood on seemed to be slipping away.

" Certainly he say that." The stranger made a funnel of his hands and applied it to Hans's ear. " He say, tell that filho da puta to get clear off my ground. Tell him from me—" A string of ugly language followed. " Do you want, my friend, to stay after that ? No. See, come *now*. I give you good food, good pay, look after good cats."

Within the circle of the tossing lights Lopez was still visible. He now had a whip in his hand : he had been cracking it without effect to draw attention to his authority, and he now began desperately to harangue the angry people who showed no signs of calming their temper.

Hans went straight up to him. He went as a dog goes up to the hand of his master.

" Senhor," he said in his dull way, forced only to these words by the strength of his feelings. " Senhor, do you command me to go away with a stranger ? "

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Lopez did not hear what was said. He only saw Hans looking stubborn, and stupider than ever, and making trouble.

"You too?" he roared. "Santa madre de Deus!" The blast of his rage nearly knocked Hans over. "Get away, go! Isn't it enough without you? Clear off!" "But—but—but—"

As if stung to ungovernable frenzy Lopez raised his whip. "*Get off this ground!*" he screamed; the thong whistled and cut Hans on the shoulder.

Hans fell on his knees in the darkness, a chip of broken glass bit into his palm.

The next moment the stranger had taken him by the waist, had hoisted him to his feet, and with a firm grip on his arm made off under cover of the dark as fast as he could towards the open common. Here there was a little cart into which he was hustled; the stranger clambered in beside him, and in a minute they were rattling sharply away under the dark starry sky.

Hans's wits were never alert: anything unusual or unexpected disorganised them completely.

It was many hours later, as dawn was breaking, before Hans spoke again; slowly, carefully.

"Who are you? Why have you taken me? Where am I going?"

The man took up from the bottom of the cart a chunk of wood and hit Hans twice on the nose.

"Thus we do to bears when we train them to know their master. Five, six month it take sometimes. Let you be more clever. Four, five days without food is also done. So they are weak they cannot run away. Sometimes they are beaten if not obey. Dogs, always. But you are good, clever dog, you learn quick to know your master." The man looked down significantly.

As if he were indeed an animal Hans had been shackled by his leg to the sideboards of the car.

C H A P T E R X X X

I

BY midday they had arrived at a piece of waste land where the man suddenly drew up. Heavy trees shadowed it, there was no hut or building anywhere near.

Here he caused Hans to descend. Still tethered, he led him across the grass to the shelter of the trees. With an extraordinary cunning pride he pointed to what stood beneath them. "I master of you," he said, "and I master of these."

Hans blinked stupidly. He could not remember why he was there, he could hardly understand what the man said, his head ached, and the shackle round his leg seemed to be burning his flesh. He looked vaguely in the direction pointed out. He looked, and then he gazed in wonder and awe. Shielded from the noonday sun there stood before him the most magnificent cages he had ever seen.

Enormously high, raised from the ground on huge scarlet wheels, bearing aloft a superstructure of carved and gilded wood, these cages resembled rather the triumphal carriages of Kings. The whole of their surface was picked out, with coloured paints, in whirls and festoons that dazzled the eye. Upon each, among scrolls and gold leaves, was inscribed on a white background the names of its occupants; each bore the carved and painted head of a tiger with roaring mouth open, holding a gold ring. Within these cages, in the darkness, the striped forms of the animals could be seen. The brilliance of the vehicles, their high wheels and tall walls hid from the eye the cramped and tiny size of the steel dens within.

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Before he had fully grasped any of these things the man pulled Hans towards him. "Now you know," he said. "This is what you do for me, now, for ever. You clean these cage. Now! Quick!"

With a swift motion he pointed to the ground where a bucket and a few implements were lying. "Yes, and at the back of cage you find straw. Not too much, not too much! Use little! Straw good, expensive. Too much waste to give all to cats like you do with Lopez. With me, now I your master, you learn different. Quick, now. Do work. Let me see."

He let go the chain by which he had been holding Hans, in order to give him the freedom he required. Yet even then he watched him closely all the time, as if ready to leap on him again in a moment.

Hans moved dully towards the tools on the ground. He understood an order, he understood duty. To handle the tools brought to him at once the sense of all being normal and orderly. . . . He lifted the long rake. As if in contrast to the magnificence of the vehicles this implement was filthily dirty and broken. Its shaft was splintered and hardly holding together, the prongs of its fork, almost worn down to the plate, were crusted with animal refuse. The bucket was dented and old and had a hole in the bottom.

"Never mind that," said the man, seeing Hans's glance, "cage can't have water to-day. Cage can't have water every day. You go fetch straw."

Hans went behind the cages, the man closely following. Here, piled against a tree, was a heap of dried-up brown straw, so thin and so brittle that it almost crumbled at a touch. Gathering some of this as well as he could in his arms, Hans approached the side of the cages. The man lifted the grid a little, an angry snarl came from within. Hans put down the straw and took the rake and went up to the bars. The stench from the dens almost over-powered him.

"Yes. You see, you see," said the man, "I busy, I away, I fetching you. No matter—one day, two day,

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what of that? That nothing. Soon clean, you work hard."

It was already quite evident to Hans that the cages had not been cleaned for weeks.

With difficulty, with nausea, he removed the bones, the filth, and the rotting straw from those brilliant carriages. Some of it was hard to detach, it had crusted so to the boards. . . .

"Never mind, never mind. You put down new straw now, eh?" said the man. "Tomorrow you do more." It seemed as if even his senses could no longer endure to be there; yet he feared to leave Hans. The straw was thrown in anyhow, the grid was slid down; he took up Hans's chain again and dragged him away. As they passed out from the trees Hans saw on the ground, in a pile surrounded by flies, the putrescent stores of the tigers' food.

It was impossible for him, after this, to eat the bread and dried fish the man gave him as soon as they reached his little camping-place beside the cart.

"Oh, well, you not eat, so much better," remarked the man, quite unconcerned. "You get no more today, at any rate." He ate his own bread and fish with extreme nicety, following it with dried figs.

"I go now," he said, as soon as he had finished. "All afternoon I do business. Much I have to arrange. Tomorrow we start our journey to join the Circus of Berg-hoff." He rummaged in the cart and produced a padlock and an extra piece of chain. He came close to Hans and stared cunningly at him. "Ha, did you think I would go away and leave you free? No, no, this lock has kept many." With a swift movement he passed the chain round the tree, the lock snapped to. Before he knew it Hans was tethered by his leg to the tree. "Ha, so we do even to elephants, how much easier to weak little boys!" He gave the chain a sharp tug that wrenched the clamped ankle painfully. "Yes, that is tight." He went over to the cart and began to climb into it. As a last thought he looked back. "In the evening

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I come back here. You get up, you give water to cats. Whatever I say you obey me. Remember, I now always your master."

That night Hans slept in the open, still chained to the tree. Next morning, with the first daylight, two large draft-horses came clattering along the road beside the common. The man was already awake, he ran out to meet them. The driver of the horses grinned when he saw him ; he grinned even more, when he crossed the common and discovered the captive tied by the leg.

" Hey, Quinchenquo, what is this pretty thing ? Aren't you an ogre, aren't you a monster now, to do a thing like this ? "

" Not at all. Naughty boy ! Paid much for him. Run away once already ! What can do ? "

The stranger opened his eyes widely and then shut them, putting his finger to his nose. In a very high voice he began to laugh. It was clear these two were old friends.

Without another word said they got to work. The cages of the tigers (their sideboards lowered) were hitched to the big horses and dragged across the heath on to the road. Here the little procession was assembled in order. The stranger led the foremost horse, which pulled the biggest cage, the other followed obediently with its own load : behind, in the little cart, amid straw, cooking-pots, canvas, the rake, the bucket, and a tangle of personal belongings, came the owner of the tigers and Hans.

For several days they travelled in this manner across the country, resting at night by the side of the road. Sometimes Quinchenquo and sometimes the other led the horses : Hans was kept always still chained to the cart. After the first day Appachio (the bringer of the horses), seeing the boy's pain from his swollen ankle, suggested that at least the manacle might be put on the other leg. This eased Hans somewhat, especially as Appachio stuffed a little straw beneath it. Beyond this neither of the men took any notice of him, except to give

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him orders. The extreme of his bewilderment had now passed : it fused into the background like the other incomprehensible things of life. He had heard the prospect of a circus mentioned. Dimly, as to another home, he looked forward to this. And dimly in his own way as the days passed he began to understand some of the quality of his new master.

II

The man was a strange type.

Of mixed blood—South-American-Spanish and Chama-coco Indian—he combined in himself the lithe movements and steady purpose of one of his native jaguars. He was a dompteur of animals, and undoubtedly he had a strange mastery of them, but he would not do the menial work required for their upkeep. Half-breed as he was, he considered it degrading. Yet it was difficult for him to find a servant. He had had plenty of troubles. Boys whose hunger he had hired spat at him on a full stomach, ran away, hid, threw stones at him from behind walls. More worthy boys, or men, he could not afford. In any case, it is not everyone who will spend his life cleaning out tigers' cages for a dirty half-breed.

His skin was dark, but with a tinge of yellow : his brilliant eyes, which he blackened with kohl, shifted restlessly always : except when he was speaking to someone with the wish to exert his will : then they fastened on his interlocutor like the teeth of a snake and could not be shaken off.

One of his peculiarities was the absence of hair on his body. He seemed to take a special pride in this : if a single hair appeared on his face he shaved it off instantly. It was as though, unconsciously, he obeyed his desire to show mastery over the beasts ; as if this hairlessness of his could be known and felt by them, and recognised as a superior quality. His black head's hair was plastered till it fitted like a skull-cap. He slept, wherever he was, in a hammock : this habit, coming from an inherited fear of snakes, derived from his ancestors in Brazil.

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Where Quinchenquo had found the money to buy his cart, or his tigers, to say nothing of their cages, was more than could be imagined. The dark improbability of this mystery seemed to hint at something dreadful. But no one questioned him on this or on his past so long as he and his animals were able to please the public.

This was his only care, and, even on the journey, his constant preoccupation. The beasts had been fully trained for their circus acts: they were perfect, said Quinchenquo in some murdered tongue, but never at any time must they forget. To aid their memories he went daily into the cages armed with a sharply pointed rod. The tigers snarled, retreated, slashed the air with their sabre-claws. They were always bleeding when Quinchenquo left them.

After the first few days he was not actively cruel to Hans. When he had discovered for certain (what he had already guessed) that Hans could neither read nor write, that there was no one to claim him, that he certainly would never return, even if he could find the way, to the master whom he thought had thrown him off, and that his wits would not supply him with an alternative, he loosed him from his chain and began to treat him with indifference. He had given his orders at first always with a raised whip in his hand, afterwards he relied only on the threat in his voice. In either case Hans obeyed dumbly.

Within a week or so they had joined up with Herr Berghoff's caravans.

III

This was the moment for which Hans had been longing. He looked around him with pleasure as soon as they reached the very entrance to the fair-ground. But he wasn't given any chance to loiter. He had to help his master at once in the disposal of the cages, and when the sites were found, to straw down the wearied and nervous beasts and give them water. It was not till the next

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day that he found time between his duties to gaze on the welcome scene.

All day fresh arrivals poured in among the sprawling wagons and tents. Noisily they jostled for places, the best of course having been taken by the first-comers. Then, once they were settled, their next concern was to take note of their neighbours. The pad-rooms and dressing-tents were full of noisy chatter. The circus atmosphere, familiar from his birth, began to rise again around Hans : these voices spoke the same words, their hopes, fears, needs, their laughter, their kindness, their vanity was the same, even their eccentricities were there, facet of the general scheme. Hans looked at them all ; and as he looked his heart sank. They were all strangers : nothing could make them different from that. The grave, kindly glance of Nordsig was missing, and the excitable, hot-headed interferences of Lopez. They were not one large family, they were a number of entertainers taking the same road for a while. Dumb as he was, he could not speak to any of them. He could not know what he missed, he could not even put it clearly in his thoughts. But as the days and weeks passed he felt a cold, sad pain rising within him. For the first time in his life, Hans felt lonely.

Even with the tigers he could not make friends, they seemed alien to all the thoughts of his upbringing. Reared in hatred and distrust, Nordsig used to say : he had not understood the words then nor could he now, but vaguely he began to understand the feeling of them, and the bitter chasm it cleft between man and beast. When he ventured near Sultano, the large young male, all the greeting he received was a flattening of the small round ears, a wrinkling of the horizontal black bars on the forehead, a curling back of the glossy black lips over the gleaming fangs, and a hiss of defiance and fear. This was not how his old friends Alberto and Domingo used to greet him. He was puzzled and hurt. He raked their straw and gave them their water with the same daily attentive indifference : nobody noticed him : apart

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from his master no one would have known if he lived or died. He was the least and lowest point in Berghoff's Circus.

IV

Herr Berghoff's Circus was undoubtedly a much grander and better-equipped establishment than most of those on the roads. Everything was orderly, scientific, and run on the latest lines.

All his caravans, for instance, were the same colour, scarlet : each had to provide itself with a wooden, brass-bound, lidded vessel for carrying drinking-water, to have a box slung on its under-carriage to store dried foods (in case the food-wagon was delayed or damaged), and never to be without its own wood-blocks to act as brakes. Then, the Big Top, which was made of eighteen pieces, was never allowed to be put up or taken down in the good old-fashioned way—that is, each piece anyhow, trusting to luck it would find its right neighbours in the end. No : here coloured pegs were placed in the ground to mark the spot where each bale of canvas had to be dropped to facilitate, later, its correct lacing in place. In order to be able to see the pegs clearly at all times and to keep them separate, they were of different colours—white pegs for early-morning work, blue for midday, red for evening. The poles, too, were set up on mud-blocks to prevent their sinking into the slush and spoiling the hang of the canvas. All this was very modern and intelligent.

Wherever one looked there was the same evidence of deeper thought on the part of the Circus proprietor.

Unlike Lopez, Berghoff insisted on each trainer owning his animals. This gave them, in his opinion, more interest at stake, therefore more care and pleasure in their work. Of course, it also deprived him of some of his rights of supervision, but in an up-to-date, well-managed concern like his supervision of the old-fashioned sort he considered unnecessary and degrading. It killed the self-respect of the artist, it was a survival of unenlightened days.

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No, there were other, subtler, and nobler ways of becoming the father of his people and of infusing them with his own spirit.

For instance, under the usual notices "Rauchen Verboten, Défense de Fumer," he had had painted up, in four languages, the words "Respectability! Prosperity!"—Feeling that perhaps this wasn't quite clear to everybody, he had changed it, after a while, to the following: "Respectability = Prosperity." Even this did not quite satisfy him. At last, on a flood of imaginative enterprise, he had had a huge panel constructed, backed with strong hooks so that it could be slung either above the entrance of his own dwelling or that of the main tent. This represented a cornucopia, surrounded by the motto: *Out of Respectability flows Prosperity*, accompanied by flourishes and many gilded underlinings. At its base the horn was very thin, prim, angular and rigid: but as it rose it swelled outwards voluptuously, tossing forth at its mouth, with an ecstatic burst, strange flowers of imperial size, huge ears of corn, and dazzling, full-bosomed fruits. This arrangement gave Herr Berghoff the keenest joy. Lying in his bed, contemplating the troubles of the day, he never failed to find comfort in it. Line, colour, sense and symbolism, thus combined, seemed to him to present a perfect and inviolable truth.

In himself, Herr Berghoff was of middle height, fair, and of a solid energy. Though deeply ambitious for his Circus and willing to humour its expenses, he spent hardly anything on himself. He had latterly acquired an over-coat with a seedy astrakhan collar and a tall black silk hat with a beautiful waist. Dressed in this he liked to stand, during the whole of the Circus performance, at the entrance to the arena, looking Respectable, looking Prosperous, and smoking an immense cigar, so much superior in size to the kind usually seen, that in itself it seemed to hint at, and symbolise, the majestic and transcending spectacles about to be revealed behind the striped walls of his theatre.

Of course, he never actually smoked this cigar. Other-

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wise it would not have lasted the month or two it had to last. Long before this time was over the cigar was an unpleasing wreck, resembling in decrepitude the shabby overcoat and the top-hat. Berghoff never observed this. The agent of prosperity, he imagined himself to be what he would like himself to be : in any case, the things that most closely affected him were to him invisible. Pottering about in his dirty work-worn clothes, he arranged for the purchase of a special new polish for the coaches and harness.

As for the interior of the arena, on this he spent infinite thought. Baskets of flowers hung under ladders, silver stars and balloons were fixed at points all round the circle, everything was rosy, glittering, elaborate. In the ring he insisted on white horses only, because white hairs do not show on performers' tights, and rosin does not show on white coats, either. Latterly he had arranged, before the entrance of the big cats in the arena, to have aromatic sticks lighted all round the walls, to burn while the iron enclosure was being erected. This delicate attention to the noses of the audience was generally regarded as a very up-to-date, luxurious and resourceful innovation.

He liked the presence of these wild things in his Circus. He felt that through them was proclaimed the harmonious dominion of man (especially modern man) over wild nature. He had recently even indulged in some sea-lions, exhibiting them as Mermaids. In spite of their incessant demand for a diet of live fish, he had become quite fond of them, and proud of them too. Reclining in a grotto of water-weeds and green canvas, they represented the Fairest Legendary Denizens of the Sea, the Only Genuine Mermaids, and they were a great draw. Unfortunately the show had to stop whenever one of the sea-lions did anything unmermaidenly.

Apart from respectability, Berghoff was sufficiently a showman to understand display. The horses' trappings of coloured leather were inset with groups of brilliants in flowers or stars ; he would finger them lovingly of a

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morning as they hung, each from its own nail, beside its own horse. It is doubtful if anyone, even the trainer, knew and admired the delicate workmanship as well as he. Certainly not the audiences.

At night he used to dream, when he was not too tired to dream, always the same picture. Two horses, cream, with green harness inset with rubies: on their heads two proud, upstanding plumes: each, on his hind legs trampling like Valkyries the circling clouds: above them the words *La Cirque du Monde*, and below them his own head, his cigar, and the tall black silk hat with the beautiful waist. . . .

Then he would wake and hear Netta beside him, complaining that she was cold. Her voice would sound cold too, and bitter.

This was a grief to him.

For once it had been clear, and cool as water. It was her voice he had heard speaking her words in a barn theatre. low, dramatic words, whispers: each syllable of them raised on the lips and the parted teeth and carried pure and sexless into the farthest corner of the barn. Berghoff had fallen in love with that voice. It had quality. It had purity. It had breeding, like a high-stepping horse. It had that calm power that arrives at its goal without needing a megaphone or a strident self-assertion. He had thought she would be happy with him in his Circus: she, the daughter of an animal-dealer, would she not take delight in the clever creatures that worked for them? But she could not think of them except as their value in money. Often now in her quiet voice she would remind him she had come to him with a dowry of four lions, a panther, a rattlesnake and a hairless cat: what had she now? Hardly the bed she slept on.

Berghoff would promise to give her, as soon as the season ended, some splendid present.

"But why not now, now? Why not a jewel for me instead of for that ridiculous harness? Why not a plume for *my* hair instead of for the manes of those dumb horses? Do I ever get a basket of flowers? Do you ever buy me

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a bottle of perfume? No, it's always the Circus, it's always the audience. Oh, I am so tired of you with your aromatic sticks and your mottoes and your roses. What do you think an audience wants? Something to make them laugh, something to make them tremble. Any fool could tell you that. And what do you think *I* want? Ah, that is a thing you never think of at all."

v

Quinchenquo now practised his animals at daybreak in the big empty twilight of the arena. He would allow no one but Hans to be present at these times. This was because the prod-rods were heated white-hot and were leaning against the bars ready for use. At the least infringement of discipline the rods were picked up by the handle end (which had a red velvet pad) and were directed at the tigers. They felt the burning glow, they fell back snarling. Sometimes they sprang at the rod: the burnt flesh hissed, a cry of pain shattered itself against the iron bars. Quinchenquo, who was clever with his fingers, would paint over afterwards the mark of the scar. He would grin, well pleased. That tiger would obey the rod for evermore.

As for Herr Berghoff, Quinchenquo had already summed him up. They had crossed swords quite early in their acquaintanceship, although each (albeit for very different reasons) had preferred to forget the matter. Quinchenquo had been describing the excellence of other performances he could give.

"And another, Herr Berghoff, let me explain! Here, also, is one that is always favourite—*Le Répas des Animaux!*—First, gongs sound. Then meal of 300 kilogrammes of meat is run along outside bars by well-dressed servants, on trolley is also flowers, fruit, wines, cigars. The tigers leap towards it, they not see they are deceived; they crush their muzzles and their manes by the iron! First they are bewildered, then, as meal passes away, their anger is roused to highest pitch, they roar à l'outrance in their disappointed rage. It is magnificent! Audience is

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fearful ! They have spectacle of ferocity from comfortable seats. Then when tigers' rage is exhausted, meat is thrown to them after all ! Perhaps now they cannot eat so well with their bruised muzzles. This make audience laugh loudly. . . ."

He had developed the theme. That was how it used to go, and very well it did, too. The public had a tremendous impression of the tigers' savage power, and yet the dompteur, when he arrived on the scene, had nothing to fear from beasts fully fed. It was a good arrangement in every way.

Yet Berghoff had answered with flint-headed stubbornness. He would not allow such a performance under his canvas. And for some totally inadequate and incomprehensible reason—cruelty to the tigers ! Whoever heard of such a thing ? *Le Répas des Animaux* had to be abandoned. It did not increase Quinchenquo's love for him.

It only increased his cunning and resourcefulness. Deprived of one of his most showy pieces, he was determined to provide another. He wanted one of his tigers to walk a tight-rope ; that is, not quite a rope but a strip of plaited canvas suspended across the arena. 'If they can walk along a tree in the jungle to please themselves, so can they walk along a rope to please me ! ' he thought cunningly.

Each morning at daybreak, the canvas rope was fixed up, the tigers were let out of their dens and urged towards it. The white-hot prod-rods forced them, step by step, up the ladder that led to the platform whence the rope swung. But after that nothing could induce them to trust their weight to the rope. Even the burning of their flesh could not teach them what was wanted. They would turn aside, leap down from the platform, and run terrified and howling round the arena. This was useless. Besides, Berghoff might hear them.

There was only one, Sultano, the finest of the young males, who had the courage and balance for this feat ; he became at last Quinchenquo's only hope ; he feared the rod, too, he had had it often. At last, one morning,

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he was forced to put one forefoot on the rope . . . then another. Snarling, hissing, lashing his tail, behind which threatened that stabbing agony of heat, he advanced his hind legs : but just as his whole body was on the rope, and was obliged to go forward, since it could not go back without burning (Quinchenquo being in a glow of triumph and delight), he lost his balance and fell to the ground ; the next instant, recovering like a cat, and with a thunderous roar and a flash of talons, he flung himself towards his tormentor. The half-breed had just time to leap back, to pull to the iron door, against which the heavy body struck, shaking the whole structure.

He did not rehearse the animals any more that morning. The rods urged the remainder to the opening which led to their cages ; here they were shut for the rest of the day. But Quinchenquo was deeply disturbed. If Sultano began to charge it might be awkward. He was afraid of going on the rope, yes : he must then be made more afraid of charging.

Two days after this his opportunity came. Herr Berghoff was to be away all day, the arena was not wanted for practice after the young riders had done their hour on the Mechanic. Before Sultano left his cage his legs were noosed, a leather harness was slipped over his shoulders , the iron-barred passage was set up, his cage door leading to it was opened, a whip was cracked behind him. Bounding among his unaccustomed trappings, he rushed into the arena ; it was empty : he stood there snarling in fear and perplexity, and looking around for his companions.

While he stood, in an instant, the ropes on his legs were hitched to the pulley which, running in a circular track overhead, upheld the beginners in their equestrian acrobatics. Then Quinchenquo advanced on him. He poked him with his pointed spear, shouted at him, slashed him across his face and shoulders with his whip. Sultano flinched and drew back growling. Again and again Quinchenquo hit him. At last he lifted from his brazier the deadly rod, red-heated. He advanced it nearer,

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nearer, nearer. . . . As if lost in a frenzy of anger and desperation, with a choking roar, Sultano charged. Instantly the ropes to the Mechanic were pulled, he was hauled into the air, hissing, clawing, twisting, helpless and almost strangled. Then he was lowered gently. He lashed his tail as his feet touched ground. He crouched: hunched his muscles: his legs strained under him: his eyes fixed in a yellow hate: he sprang. The ropes swung, he was jerked into the air again. His paws waved feebly, his ferocious growl rumbled weakly away in astonishment and pain. Several times this manœuvre was repeated: at last Sultano was bleeding with the cutting of the ropes on his skin, and when he was dropped from them he lay still, not offering to move. Quinchenquo was streaming with sweat from hauling the heavy body, with the sole help of Appachio, his only confederate. Hans was outside the bars: he was streaming with sweat too, from an inexplicable emotion. At that moment Herr Berghoff's voice was heard. He had not, then, gone away after all.

With one swift movement Quinchenquo released the ropes from the pulley, in a second the door was open, the young tiger sprang through it, dragging his harness after him; Hans followed. It was now his duty, he knew, to see Sultano back to his cage. A feeling he had never before experienced was forcing the tears from his eyes, and pushing the hard sobs into his throat, as he sat beside the bleeding body.

Berghoff entered the arena briskly. Whatever had been his occupation, it had evidently been satisfactorily concluded. Beaming upon the two men, he began to tell them how in future the lights were to be placed below large festoons resembling palms, and other jungle foliage, on each of the eight main uprights of the steel arena: this, besides improving the spectacle, would give the tigers confidence, make them feel more at home; the sight of familiar, natural surroundings was well known to have a salutary effect on the mind.

"We must all try," he said kindly, "to get rid of *fear*. By this, of course, I do not mean your own *fear*, no, no, I

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would not so insult you : I mean that of the animals. Yes, we must gradually draw away all fear from them and implant, instead, love and respect, that alone brings a fruitful co-operation. . . . Dear me, how very careless to have left that tackle ! I must speak to the ring-master ; it should be put away at once after use. Well, young people are thoughtless, it is well known——” With a few deep psychological observations he departed briskly on his errand.

Even Appachio was dumbfounded. “Everybody knows that animals must be ruled by fear. What else ? ” Quinchenquo, in contemptuous silence, made a sign expressing his opinion of the Circus-owner.

After this success with Sultano he expanded considerably in his own self-esteem. He began to show his authority over the animals ever more heavily. He seemed to exult in the hate he bore them and in their enforced submission to his designs. He looked at them savagely, with a deep meaning. “ You tore my fore-fathers in the jungle, you crunched their bones as they lay stark in the long grass without weapons : now *I* am the master, I have these heavy bars to keep you in, I have the whip and the spear and the revolver to mock you, mock you ! —Yes, look at me, growl, rage ! You cannot hurt me. But I can hurt you. I can burn your fur and cut your faces with my lash, and you cannot touch me. Come, leap over the bar ! Think you are in the jungle, leaping on your prey. Leap to amuse the crowds by whom I live, and stub your noses on the bars when I trip you. Sit up on this stool. Raise your forefeet—up, up, up ! Yes, I know it is agony to sit where your tail has been burnt, yet you shall do it. Now you look foolish, oh, my lords ; in spite of all your strength that could kill a man you have to sit for the crowd to laugh at you. Flinch, my whip bites you ! You can’t escape. It is long, it reaches you everywhere. It cuts you all over.—Jump down ! Go back into your corner, growling, beaten, defeated. It is my revenge.”

As time passed he used to look with contemptuous

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wonder at Hans as, carefully as ever, he raked in the fresh straw over the swilled boards, or gently tended a hurt paw, or brought fresh drinking-water to a young mother with cubs.

"Why do you care for them?" he asked. "You not know their feelings? Look, when you feed them. They stand on meat with their forepaws, they press with their feet, one by one, licking it all over. Why? It is to press out the blood. Yes, to press it out and to lick it up! That is all they think of. Large, raw lump of meat, that is their thought. Whether it comes from horse, or from you, or from me, they would not care. When they see you come nearer, do you not know what they wish? It is that they could rend you, that they could dare to tear you in pieces."

Hans would hardly hear him. He would continue to care for the animals as usual: and as usual Quinchenquo would not know of half he did.

One of Herr Berghoff's reforms was the abolition of the old-fashioned flag "Hotel"; instead, each performer bought himself food-tickets which admitted him to meals: there was no limit to these, the rich or gluttonous could buy any number. It was easy for Quinchenquo to buy meals for Hans, thus increasing his dependence upon him; without anyone being aware, either, that the boy received no pay.

This made things much simpler for his master, who had decided by this time that he would not part with him. Already he had secured a contract from Berghoff for the following season: it was with much complacency he viewed the closing year when the animals were transferred for two months to permanent dens in winter gardens.

To Hans it mattered little where they were: his life was the same, his loneliness was the same, and the same was his dumb inability to express it. To the animals alone he gave his secret thoughts in the wordless sounds they seemed to understand. Did they understand? They rose and looked at him quietly when he came near and

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rubbed their sides against the bars where he stood. He who was not as others took some dim pleasure in this. He was still able to recall the days when all animals were friendly, when all people, too, had faces that smiled, and knew him. What had happened since then? He tried to think but he could not comprehend. . . .

VI

Then all of a sudden it was Spring again. Quinchenquo linked up the animals' cages, hired the draft-horses, and made his way to join Berghoff's company for the new season.

Now, upon the circus-field the blacksmith's hammer was heard, riveting, mending, making ready for the roads again. A redoubled energy inspired everybody; they prophesied, as usual, a profitable year. The elephants trumpeted at exercise; in the long spring darkness the big cats leapt all night. Everything seemed freshened and made important; even the droppings of the beasts seemed no longer obnoxious or their removal a tedious and menial task; all was exalted by the splendour of the sun's new rays.

Herr Berghoff began his opening peroration. "Ahem! . . . Ladies and Gentlemen." He called them this always, fitting it to the country they were visiting at the time. "Mesdames et Messieurs! Señoras! Caballeros!"

First a little record of his past. "I do not forget I once went from town to town in France in a condition very different from that in which you see me today. At that time, to be good, to be wealthy even, it was only necessary to have two wagons, each with a small balcony in front, always trimmed with flowers before a performance. One clown, one acrobat, one circus-rider: a drum, a piccolo, a horn. First, too, a verbal permission to perform at all, given by the village-mayor, no seats, no tickets, the clown took the hat round afterwards. If we made a handful of copper each we were delighted. Now look at us! The largest, the most famous, the most up-to-date, the best-managed circus in the world! Why? Let me tell you. *Respectability!*"

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He gave these little addresses at frequent intervals throughout the season; the very words Mesdames, Messieurs! were fraught in his opinion with a deep psychological influence, acting beneficially on even the most uncultured inmates of his circle.

Though he had not yet bought Netta her present, he redoubled the gilt on the carriages and stalls, he multiplied the baskets filled with paper-roses that hung from the ceiling among the acrobats' feet. He noticed with intense satisfaction the skill displayed by every one of the performers, and in his large, gentlemanly manner he endeavoured to throw an uplifting influence over their lives.

All the same, as time passed, he began to be worried about the tigers. First one thing, then another, seemed to happen that was unfortunate. He did not pry, of course, he did not question, yet he could not help noticing their demeanour when he passed their cages. The animals seemed restless—nervous, almost, you might think. The smallest thing caused them to panic. If a horseman rode too near their dens, if a tail of canvas flapped in the wind, they developed in one instant a tumult of terror and anger, and turning on their cage-mates (with whom they lived happily), rent them savagely with their long sabre-claws. At these times a mad incomprehensible frenzy seemed to seize them. He began to fear that one day they might perhaps attempt to maul their trainer. . . . He spoke to the half-breed about it, courteously, deferentially, careful not to appear as if he were finding fault, or wished in any way to hurt the feelings of the expert. Quinchenquo explained it all quite easily. One of the tigresses was expecting cubs, this always made the whole lot restless and irritable. When the cubs arrived all would be well.

Yet when the cubs arrived all was very far from well. The first Berghoff had heard was a commotion at the cages, where it was discovered the male tiger had killed and eaten one of the young and now, in a passion of rage, was fighting the tigress who was defending the other two: the noise was appalling, the whole line of tigers

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joined in, and the other animals contributed bellows and whinnies of fear. Quinchenquo was heard shouting distractedly for help : he and two others threw buckets of cold water over the combatants, who eventually were parted. Things were quieted ; a partition was set up in the cage to separate the animals. During the night the partition was broken down, and the tigress killed her mate. Then a fit of remorse or insanity overwhelmed her. She killed the other cubs and tore her own flesh. The morning light revealed her bleeding among the tattered woodwork and the bodies of those she had loved. For months afterwards she could not be used in the arena ; she seemed to have forgotten her tricks, Quinchenquo said sourly ; she spent the whole day and night whimpering, searching for her little ones. The loss of these two performers, one a large male, was serious.

Yet how useless, thought Berghoff, sitting at his own well-ordered desk, to recall misfortunes that one could not foresee or prevent and which, in any case, were over ! Better to consider successes, and to apply oneself to the present problems.

He drew towards him a journal he studied weekly. His last purchase had done well, though quite by chance he had come upon its advertisement.

"A vendre : un grand Théâtre de Singes et Chiens Savants et Cirque miniature : l'éléphant (travail hors ligne), 4 petits chevaux nains bien dressés : 2 moutons : 6 singes et 8 chiens. Tous ces animaux sont dressés et garantis. . . ."

He had bought the lot and they had made a splendid Act, especially the *Singes* and *Chiens Savants*. The Duc de Brunswick (*singe*) arrives, drawn by six horses (*chiens*) ; the coachman (*singe*), in a three-cornered hat edged with white, a white wig and a braided coat, looks out cleverly from under his meeting brows and waves his whip : behind him two postillions (*chiens*), perched high, display superb balance in an erect attitude. . . .

Yes, they had been a good investment ; now he meditated another.

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"*Un phénomène à vendre : Veau, ayant la tête d'un chien bouledogue, la queue et le femur de l'ours, les quatre pieds de porc : cet être vivant est hermaphrodite et fait toutes ses ordures par le même orifice. Agé de quatre mois . . . A vendre : un établissement de pommes de terre frites, entièrement neuf : façade vitru 5 metres, avec belle cuisine belge à 4 foyers, 4 marmites, Machine à découper, pompe à bière, etc. Conditions avantageuses. . . .*"

This required very careful thought. The *veau* would undoubtedly be a great attraction, but possibly, possibly, lacked a little in refinement? . . . The *pommes de terre frites* without question collected a crowd at the entrances to the Circus, yet would their sale, perhaps, be a little below the dignity of an up-to-date, well-run show like his? It was one of those matters which required extreme nicety and balance of judgment. On the other hand, it might be possible—

A head poked in at the door. "Excuse me, Herr Berghoff, would you come and inspect the new lighting arrangements? The kerosene-lamps have now all been fitted with the coloured glasses, the man wishes to know whether—"

Berghoff left his papers and trotted off happily; this was a matter in which his very soul was concerned.

The afternoon sun was blazing hot, it poured its strength upon the fair-ground, drawing up taints and reeks of refuse, decayed food, fruit-rinds, moisture, and animal exhalations. The band was blaring fortissimo, the cheap-jacks were bawling their wares, the bare flaming torsos of wrestlers appeared above the heads of the crowd, raised on their platforms, and shouting, "Allo right!" Here and there, amid a crash of flute and cymbal, the tumblers formed pyramids and did hand-turns; the people cried aloud their interest and wonder as they passed through the entresorts. Amongst these thrusting, noisy, malodorous crowds Berghoff pushed his way. It lay past the tigers' cages; as he neared them he had to step aside for the density of the throng. The tigers' breath, reeking of carrion, came towards him: it was too true, they were uneasy, there was something wrong. What made them look like that? He stopped to consider, dragging his

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mind from the coloured glasses ; in that moment someone was pushed by the crowd against the bars of the cage. There was a flash of steel talons, a rent, a scream. On the boy's arm four long scarlet lines sprang into sight above the coat-sleeve, ripped from shoulder to wrist. Almost at once, while he stared uncomprehending, blood rushed from the four trenches. A terrific shouting arose instantly from the whole crowd, some rushed towards him, some backed away, some pressed onwards, too, without knowing why. The tiger had slunk into the farthermost part of his cage : he was snarling defiance, hissing, swinging from foot to foot, terrified of what he had done.

Poor Berghoff ! What a disaster this was for him. What could he do if the imbecile crowds would not heed the warning written in three languages beside the cages ? Stupider than beasts, stupider than beasts ! Now the boy's arm would swell, it would grow black, he would become raging hot, even in a few hours his whole body would be throbbing with pain. In a day or two, yes, at the outside, only a few days, he would be dead. Blood-poisoning. Everyone knows it.

See, already the boy's eye is fixed, as if already he looked into the land where in a few hours he will set foot. He staggers away blindly, his coat-sleeve dangling. The people are pushing in all directions ; some of them see him, turn, stare. . . . Gott in Himmel !—Blow, blare the band ! Louder, you cannon-throated brass ! Fling up the tune, piccolo !—In such a throng few can have seen, with so much noise no tell-news voices can be heard.—Here ! Gaston ! Stepan ! Down with the side-boards ! Shut out of sight that tortured vision of death. New crowds are pouring up : come, you : deflect them. Shout them this way, *this* way ! “Step this way for the world's most famous menagerie, Ladies and Gentlemen !”

*I'd like to be a sailor on a bright blue sea,
I'd like to be a shepherd on a sun-kissed lea,
It's fine to be an Emperor, it's grand to be a king,
But best to be a circus-boy, a-riding in the ring. . . .*

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He was streaming with sweat when he reached the coloured lamps.

"Quinchenquo," said Berghoff in the evening, "you must by some means restore the good temper of your cats. You must indeed. I insist upon it. I cannot allow this to go on. I understand, of course, my good fellow, it is not your fault; yet you see for yourself the danger to the public cannot possibly be permitted to continue. What remedy can you suggest?"

"Yes, Herr Berghoff, I see. For Victory now always a wire-netted cage."

"But what is the reason, the cause? Could you not try to cure *that*? In these days of enlightenment, you know, we must search always for the roots of troubles."

Quinchenquo was silent. Then he said slowly: "I think perhaps tigers not very well. Tiger medicine very expensive. You give me some more pay, Herr, I buy medicine cure all tigers' bad temper. Very difficult, illness of big cats. All animal dealer say so."

Berghoff had a sudden inspiration. "Yes, of course I will give you a little extra to pay for anything you may need. It is good of you, it is just what I always wish, that my trainers should have a real love and care for their charges. And I will ask my wife to help you, too. I have just recollect she had much to do with the sickness of animals at one time, among her father's stock. Perhaps she could even advise you. Yes, I will ask her to come to the cages this evening."

That was how Quinchenquo met Netta.

She came along in the evening with her long, insolent stride. He looked at her. Her body was lithe and bony, but her breast was like an overripe fruit. Whether it was the artificial circles under her eyes, or the deep red line emphasising her mouth, a hardness was in her face, a discontented, calculating look that yet pleased him.

"Good evening, Frau Berghoff," he said with extreme civility.

He showed her first the baby jaguars that he had

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acquired to replace the tigers lost last year ; their claws were troubling them, they would do as well as anything else for her to examine. Black velvet flowers grew on their fur, five round petals and a black centre. The essential meaning of this sensuous pattern struck, not for the first time, his aboriginal mind. He looked at her again. Already she had pulled the animals on to her dirty skirt. Fearlessness was hers, anyway.

"Let me help you, Frau Berghoff," said the half-breed.

He knelt beside her. She looked across the back of the young jaguar and saw his face, bold, humble, and cunning, his black eyes fixed on hers and filled with an inexpressible meaning. . . . Under the force of their practised gaze a feeling arose within her, like a bird that suddenly beats its wings within its cage ; it was sharp and fluttering, yet sweet and heavy . . . it was something she had not felt for a long time.

His own peculiar odour floated from him. She saw beneath his collar a rent in the fine, expensive shirt showing a patch of dirty yellow skin. All at once she seemed to know what manner of man he was. A wave of relief passed through her. She had something in common with him. He would not bore her. No respectability about him.

After this she came every evening. They spoke little, and in general with pointed formality. It pleased Netta to recall that this man was a servant, a hireling of the Circus, and to treat him as such, with contempt, while his slow black gaze devoured her. And word by word he dropped his stories of the past—a hint, a phrase, that lightened the gloom of his dark mysterious background. Out of this arched hollow a few words threw some object into prominence, it showed for a second in startling colours, savage, unchaste. At once the dark engulfed it ; the formal sentences passed again between them.

Below all this flowed the current of their understanding. They had given up all pretence of searching for a cure for the tigers. It seemed even as if Netta, too, exulted in secret in their silent, numbed fury. And Quinchenquo

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paraded more than ever his mastery of them, having for audience always her two eyes. He flung before her his power over the beasts. Thus and thus should I do to you, it cried, I, this power, used how differently ! See, I am Man. Even the wild brutes know it.

All the animals were beaten unmercifully, often blinded with steel-thonged whips, often burned and shot. The pellets remained just under the skin for days, keeping bad memories alive. The white-gloved hands in the arena handled always the leaden-tipped Blacksnake, the prod, or the revolver. The extreme apathy of fear fell upon all the tigers : and as their resistance sank the glory, the triumph of the half-breed swelled and rose.

Sultano, the fine full-grown male, was sometimes too frightened even to enter the arena, he had to be prodded in the haunches with pointed steel shafts to make him move. He would stand trembling, hesitating in the entrance ; a long whip-cut slashed his hide, he would leap wildly, jump over the bar : he would stop, he was prodded again, his paw would swirl in a flashing circle of steel claws ; the whip would descend, he would leap, the second bar would be over ; and so on to the end. He would be sent back to his cage whimpering, licking the long welts in his hide, and in his heart knowing himself beaten. . . .

How useless to struggle ! Beaten, *beaten*. Eyes filling with blood from the slashes across the eyelids, head aching from the blows of the heavy club, lips bleeding where the whip had cut them against the teeth. . . . Ah, the taste of the salt blood ! It makes the growls come up into your throat ; it makes you maddened ; it makes you know at last that your power is not quenched ! Deep in your heart it flames still, rising and rising on the choking growls, swinging and gathering force as you sway your weight from foot to foot, alive, alive in the dark, winding the momentum of hate and revenge.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE creaking of the wagon-wheels sounded unfamiliar in the altered air. . . . The whole face of nature seemed disturbed. The insects sharpened their note under the motionless grey arch of the sky, birds cried once, twice, and fled with quick flutters into the deepest parts of the woods. A snake flicked by without a care for the hoofs and wheels, intent on urgent business; a lizard rustled swiftly across the path, at whose edges spiders were violently shaking their webs. Suddenly a flock of yellow butterflies sprang up in a panic and flapped jerkily to and fro.

These signals were instantly understood. Cracking their long whips, the drivers of wagons hastened their speed, the riders urged their horses to a gallop. Berghoff himself superintended the rapid assembling of outriders on hook-rope teams to pull the cages. Amid cries, curses, and callings on saints, the huge vehicles containing the beasts and the heavy poles and properties were sent lumbering and swaying along the rough track. The crockery and tin rattled from within as the painted houses lurched forwards, their curtains bellying. A muffled roar came suddenly from the tigers hurled against the wooden shutters and the bars.

Amongst this commotion the wilderness itself remained still. Already the larger things of the woodland had felt its silence: by twos and threes they came up from the open: rabbits, deer, wild pigs. United in a common fear they came wavering through the grasses, then scuttled for shelter; in a moment they were hidden, crouching in their lairs.

A heavy purple cloud formed slowly in the south and,

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rising, covered the entire expanse of the sky. Far away on the horizon trees were bending, showing the approach of the storm. Yet at hand there was still a complete absence of air: a vacuum in which nothing stirred. Into this the whole breath of the forest suddenly respiration. The dried twigs rattled on the branches, the dead leaves and grass underfoot turned over and over, hissing and sweeping along. Against the darkness of the sky, suddenly, the first of the lightning flashed its forked whip, whose crack shook the whole air.

Then the heavens opened. The plum-coloured cloud parted to deliver a solid sheet of water. Within a few minutes every member of the company was drenched to the skin.

At the back of the rain came the wind, driving the grey spears in slanting lines, raising bubbles as they struck the earth, piling up, in an instant, gallons of water that splashed and raced through the driving wheels, and overflowed on each side in brimming pools, wind-crinkled. Amid the thrumming rattle of the rain came the roaring and the hissing of the big cats, the shrill cries of monkeys, the bellowing of the rhinoceros.

Herr Berghoff called on everyone for greater effort and more speed. "Messieurs! Mesdames!" he shouted through his hands (they were in France), "I beg of you, energy, courage, co-operation! We must use all endeavour to reach the river speedily, before it overswells. It must without question be crossed before nightfall. Without that we are lost! Yet I know, I know well, I can rely on your helpful service!" . . . The rain sluiced out of his hat on to the green shoulders of his old overcoat as he stood addressing the company in uplifting terms.

They all understood the danger as well as he did. Beyond the river lay their food and their night's shelter, that is, the stores and tents sent ahead the previous day. A glitter through the trees as they neared the banks showed the already swollen tide.

This was the ford. They all regarded it with con-

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jecture. The bridge was miles away to the south ; but the ford was not too deep yet ; with no further loss of time the caravans at least could hope to cross it without disaster, and as the flood rose, well, the elephants must drag the rest.

In a few minutes the bank was filled with the sound of the clatter of metal, the creaking of wood, with shouting men and with struggling horses. The passage of the river was begun.

Through the swirling waters splashed the little coloured dwellings, the ford-way was narrow, one only could cross at a time ; the waves, rising higher each moment, lapped nearly to the windows as the last one passed over. Meanwhile all the animals that could swim were urged to cross the flood ; their cages, it was decided, could be dragged through afterwards, if necessary under water. At the river's brink the animals sat, shivering and alarmed, the wind whipping under their fur.

With shouts and threats they were forced into the water from the hither side : from the other their masters called to them with endearments and encouragement. One by one they got across. And all the while, in their slow, methodical manner, the elephants made the passage to and fro.

At last it came to the turn of the tigers. But here was a difficulty. Tigers were not like others : for them to be loosed, for them to swim, was a different matter. Quinchenquo opposed the suggestion with heat.

" Cannot all quadrupeds swim ? " asked Berghoff mildly. " It would not in any case be the first time tigers have swum the Rhone. To pull them through in their boxes will be to drown them."

Quinchenquo pointed out, with some reason, the enormously high wheels, the raised floor-boards and lofty superstructure of his vehicles. Yet to be accommodating, he would raise the roof-gratings : thus if the boards were awash, or even if the water rose high, the beasts would rise upon it, swimming in their cages, yet confined within the high walls.

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With great difficulty this was done, the gratings were lashed with ropes, the big elephant took the pull of the wagon-traces, and the first part of the convoy struggled over. The elephant now turned to traverse the river again for the last crossing. The whole of this time the rain had not ceased to fall. The water lapped ever higher on the banks, the wind thrust its surface into slanting ridges of steel grey. The bed of the ford was churned and broken with the passage of wheels and the gathering strength of the current. The task, however, was almost done ; on the farther bank remained now only the last of the hook-rope men and the big solitary cage of Sultano. Splashing, it entered the river. Its weight was little enough to stem the increased power of the water which swirled round it angrily, piling in ripples and throwing up spray on the weather side : before it was gone far it rocked violently once or twice on the uneven bottom. About half-way across it stuck altogether. The driver, prodding the elephant with a bull-hook, urged her to the utmost of her power : she made a great effort, straining her huge limbs forward ; the carriage behind her was forced to follow. As if surmounting an obstacle it rose higher and higher out of the water, its wet sides, painted with red, white and gold, gleamed brightly ; then with a swift motion it tilted, plunged forwards, and was lost to sight entirely under the flood, whose churning whorls alone marked where it had been. But below the surface the angry current wrenched at the grating : even as the elephant checked, unable to drag the resisting mass, even as the men were shouting on all sides imprecations and advice, the head of Sultano appeared, already many yards downstream, marking with a glossy wedge of black and yellow the grey steel surface of the water.

Sultano swam easily, the current swayed but did not master him. At once the men on the other side ran down the bank to the spot where he must land.

Quinchenquo stood there too, a noosed rope in one hand, in his other the whip. As he neared the shore Sultano

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saw him ; as if paralysed by some emotion he stopped swimming. Then he turned suddenly and paddled back towards midstream, the current bearing him swiftly down the river. Caught in the rapids of that violent water, Sultano turned once more to make for the shore ; again, within a few yards of landing, he hesitated at the vision of that remembered figure ; again he retreated to the greater safety of the torrent. Quinchenco's face was pale with fury and despair : he ran down the bank with the other men, farther and farther, as the current swept the animal downstream, acutely aware that every moment his prestige and his pride were collapsing. For nearly an hour this criss-cross battle continued. At last the tiger began to show signs of fatigue, even his powerful forearms could not fight for ever against that ceaseless buffeting ; his head had sunk low, it showed now only as a smear among the waves.—To lose Sultano, too, that would be disastrous ! Yet better that than to go too near without weapons and be rent in pieces. . . .

" So, after all, say adieu to your beast, you cowardly little half-breed ! " cried the driver of the elephant who had at last got rid of the cage by cutting the traces, and had now come up to try to give assistance.

Hans heard him.

As if realising for the first time the full significance of all that had happened, he looked up ; he saw the striped head and round yellow eyes of Sultano gleaming palely upon the flood. He walked down the bank and straight into the river up to his arm-pits. " Sultano ! " he called in the voice he reserved for the animals, and added some of those sounds which no one could understand. The big head turned, feebly the heavy, sinking body came towards him. He moved a little downstream to meet its drifting path. As soon as it came near he reached out his arm and seized the thick sodden fur of the neck, holding the head up, and speaking to Sultano in a gentle voice. The animal's mouth was open, water was washing in and out of it, yet he continued to paddle weakly with his paws.

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With all his strength Hans helped his progress, gaining firmer foothold as the water became shallower with the steepening bank. The large body was heavy with its additional weight of wet fur, and it was slippery, too, to hold with ice-cold hands ; yet finally he succeeded in bringing the half-drowned tiger to land.

Sultano lay weak as a kitten on the bank. At once Quinchenquo came up to him, the other men closed round to help ; his feet were shackled, he was carried in a strip of canvas to a temporary den.

With some difficulty order was restored among the circus-people. They were quite exhausted and wet through as much from the storm of rain as from the passage of the flood. Berghoff had arranged for them all to meet the first part of the transport at the corner of the main road which here came near the river. With this in their minds they hastened wearily to reassemble their wagons and properties. The shivering dogs, monkeys, horses were hastily rubbed and replaced in their kennels, cages, halters and traces ; elephants were sent to the place where even the path leading from the ford was now under water. With their slow, imperturbable lurching gait they took their way : pressing their foreheads against the trucks, they pushed them up the steep bank and to the other side, whence they could proceed easily. At last, most of the company had collected their belongings and arrived at the rendezvous on the main road. The rain had now ceased, a delicious evening freshness was on the air, through which filtered the pale and watery gleams of the sun.

Here, from the bank on the roadside, after first sounding the bugle-call for Parade to collect the stragglers, Herr Berghoff addressed them,

“ Dear colleagues and friends.”

It pleased him to look down on their upturned faces and to know that by his delicate authority and by the cumulative power of suggestion, applied in the most modern manner, they had all, once more, won through successfully a difficult and trying situation. “ And when

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I say friends, I include, of course, the noble animals whose skill we have the honour to exhibit to the admiring world. . . . Once more, then, dear friends, as so often in the past, co-operation, optimism, and goodwill have enabled us to surmount successfully a trying and difficult situation. . . . Looking back on the past——”

On her upturned box behind the orator Netta grimaced, turning her eyes to heaven and spreading her hands; delighting in the knowledge that only one man in the audience would recognise this action of ridicule and contempt. To her surprise his face was distorted only in a sullen cold fury, and for once his glance failed to meet hers.

“ And then again, looking forward into the future . . . ” said Herr Berghoff blissfully. He glanced up as he spoke. Almost miraculously appropriate, a rainbow arched the sky.

Its brilliant colours, clear as if reflected from the first dawning of the world, were laid in a strong beam upon the dark vault of blue-grey: behind it appeared its echo, subtler, more liquid, and softly vibrating at the edges. Below this double span hung a radiance that illuminated the whole land to the limits of the horizon; fields, trees, distant farms, glittered and glowed in every detail with an impossible nearness in this searching light: even the long blue shadows looked like pencils of blue crystal laid upon the grass.

Berghoff paused. The whole of his thoughts turned, swept in one moment from earth to heaven: the entire company stood transfixed, gazing stupidly at the sky and at the leader whose fount of words it had so suddenly dried up. And at that moment, in the clear silence, a sound flashed towards them, so high, so sweet, it breathed the very essence of the rainbow itself. Light as a bird it travelled up, up, up; its pure notes trilled joyously in the transparent spaces of the air.

Round the corner of the main road a man came, playing a flute.

His tall frame stooped a little, his grey hairs flowed out

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on each side under his cap, the hollows in his cheeks and under his eyes showed clearly in the brightness of the light that flooded him. He was old, that was plain ; yet he marched forward briskly, playing his tune. As if he had already, long ago, completed his discourse, Berghoff stared attentively at the stranger, coming towards him thus under the fading arch of the rainbow.

At the brave sight of so many men, horses and wagons, the musician slowed up. His notes trembled away. He looked around. A travelling circus. The sight seemed to gladden him. He saw the caravans and the cages and the piebald ponies ; aloft on the bank he saw a man in authority. He turned towards him and bowed.

"Excuse me, sir, would you have the goodness to tell me whether by any chance this is the Cirque Lopez ? "

Berghoff stared again. The utterance, pedantically polite, in its pure, educated accent, received an instant welcome in his mind : the man's whole appearance, seen close, was charming and unusual. A fine face, with some rare quality ; an aristocratic bearing under the ragged coat ; lean hands that held culture. These were things Berghoff could understand. In his up-to-date way swiftly he tried to analyse them. . . . Suddenly he felt as if he were beholding a phenomenon more admirable than a Singe Savant, or the Veau à tête bouledogue. . . .

"Unfortunately, no. This Circus is mine, Herr Berghoff, the largest and finest Circus, if I may say so, in the world. We have only now successfully achieved the dangerous crossing of a flooded river. I do not think any circus has passed before us, I know none follows." Berghoff glanced at his men questioningly ; in doing so something further struck his attention. The whole company was looking at the stranger with interest, even the cold weariness of their faces seemed to have lightened a little from his tune. . . .

"I suppose, mein Herr," said the musician, "it would be too much to hope that you should require the services of a flautist ? I was once a flautist in a circus, the

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Cirque Lopez, in fact it is that which I—— It is so many years now since I—or rather——” A film seemed to come over the man’s mind, like a film over a bird’s eye: his words faltered, his gaze wandered: in a moment it had passed, his look was bright again. “At least, if you are travelling,” he said politely, “permit me to accompany you.”

“Certainly,” said Berghoff. “By all means. Nothing would please me better. And as for a flautist—why, yes——” (A brilliant idea occurred to him. He looked at his companions. Their interest had not relaxed.) “Why, certainly, a little musical accompaniment is often of value on the march.”

So a bargain was struck there, by the roadside; the musician was engaged to travel with the Circus and provide light music as required. The deep psychology of his motive pleased Berghoff intensely: he felt, besides, that the mere appearance of the man, as an exhibit, would lend a particular distinction to his entourage.

The whole cavalcade now set off, in the evening light, to their quarters outside the town. Arrived there, fires were lighted, food cooked, tents rapidly erected. All felt that somehow they had done something heroic; that rest, food, warmth, was doubly earned. They dried their soaking garments cheerfully, chattering like jays, discussing the day.

But Quinchenquo sulked aside, sullen and furious. He had so often, before them all, preened his vanity as dompteur of wild beasts. . . . Whip in hand, he stalked now between the tents, cursing anew the moment that had seen his helplessness, wondering anew, desperately, if Netta had observed it. At last he went round to the cages to close them down for the night. A light showed among them. His temper flared at once. Who dared leave a light among his cages?

It was Hans. With some dim memories of Nordsig’s tuition he had lighted a small oil-lantern within the cage of Sultano to bring warmth to the numbed body, and now

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on his knees beside it, he was rubbing with a rough cloth the dripping inert limbs. In one instant Quinchenquo recollected the necessity of this act and the folly of its neglect, which his own angry preoccupations had caused : his temper seized immediately upon Hans.

"Here, you ! I want speak you ! How dare you go in river get cat ? Who you think you are ? What you think I waiting for ? I wait till right moment come, *I* cat's master, *I*, *I* ! If I say cat drown, then he drown ; but no drown, no—for why ?—I save him ! Who ask you, dirty useless boy, wretched brat, jump in river ? You think you clever, eh ? I show you how clever you." He raised his whip, screaming. Hans looked up mildly, he seemed unable to understand. The lantern-light threw his shadow hugely into the corner. . . . All at once Quinchenquo realised his servant was no longer a brat, no longer a boy, he was almost a young man. This sudden realisation alarmed him and lashed his fury. He raised the bars and jumped into the den.

"How dare you bring here light, set fire cage ? Think I not know what best for cats ? Get out ! I teach you come interfere ! Ha, you feel that ! Let you know I always master. I whip bad cats, I whip bad servant. Get out !"

Across the extended body of Sultano the whip slashed, it cut Hans once, twice, deeply. He was hurt, astonished, bewildered, he could not speak. Quinchenquo smacked at his face with the whip-thong as he smacked at the faces of his tigers. Hans winced, as they did, and drew back. Quinchenquo slipped up the sliding bars and pushed Hans out : then he jumped out after him and shot home the door of the cage. Just as Hans was stumbling to his feet he struck him again across the back : the long steel-lined whip, travelling now full circle, ripped his thin coat from neck to hem. Without any more words Quinchenquo strode off into the darkness.

Hans remained where he had fallen, kneeling beside the cages ; he felt no longer his hunger (Quinchenquo had forgotten the food-ticket for his supper) : he felt no

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longer the icy weight of his clothes, still drenched from the river : he felt only the pain on his flesh, and the pain in his mind that groped to understand. . . .

This was the first time his master had beaten him.

CHAPTER XXXII

I

PERROGUET was glad to be with a circus again. He had been told so often that the Cirque Lopcz did not exist, had never existed, in any case existed now no longer : at last it was almost difficult not to believe it. And if that was so, then he might as well be here as continue to search for Lopez. After all, it wasn't Lopez he was looking for.

Within the first week he had spoken to all the leading members of the company, questioning them earnestly as to any circus-gossip they had picked up on the roads. For, if Lopez had indeed retired, as he was forced to fear, what about Herr Kranz ? He would have carried on the business, surely ! Had they, perhaps, heard anywhere of the Circus of Kranz ? It was little enough he got out of them. He recalled with sadness how often he had asked the question before.

Yet it pleased him to recollect the old habits, the old slang, the familiar traditions. He took a quiet pleasure in the things going on around him. He liked to see the Singe Savant, dressed as the Duke of Wellington, walking about taking snuff ; or the horse saving its master by untying the rope with its teeth, or seizing the mantle of the robber so that the bag of gold fell out : or the deer jumping over the twelve archers. In such a large company as Berghoff's he could not know everybody : those that pleased Perroguet best were the Japanese acrobats. He warmed instinctively to their child-like gaiety and their physical perfection. With delight he used to watch them, practising hand-stands while waiting for their turn, rubbing powder into their palms,

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kicking to free their knees and ankles, jumping into the air and landing with knees flexed apart, feet turned in, the position resembling a frog, to which their yellow skins added force. They were all small, with good muscles and perpetual grins.

For all these things in themselves drew Hili nearer. The familiar ellipse of the Hippodrome track, or the circus-ring itself, with its immutable fourteen-yards-nine-inches diameter, raised always the vision of the silver child, circling, a-horseback. Yes, he was right to come back to the Circus; it would call to her, too: somehow or other, it would bring them together in the end.

"See now, in any case," he would say to himself: "recount the people I have met again, from time to time. . . . Andrea,—Sebastian,—Suki,—the Spanish Condesa. That is four whom I have known, and whom I have again encountered, always by chance."

He put up the fingers of his right hand. Very firm, and solid, and comforting, they looked against the evening sky.

"So, that makes four. Quite a large number. Can I not, then, hope to meet her again too, for whom I am searching? See, that will be five, the whole hand." Alas, the fifth was the thumb, different, uncomplying. As if it were an incontrovertible presage, sadness filled him.

Thus he swung from hope to fear: and the Circus swung along too on the old, time-hallowed orbit.

Roads, always the same roads. Summer here, winter there. As if bound on a revolving wheel, the chain moves, eternally whirling all races, all destinies, all ambitions, to a grey blur from which nothing is distinguishable. The same houses appear bathed in the same light as last year from the skies of May; the same hills jag the dark clouds slashed with December rain. Only the old hope stays that here, or there, one may meet a friend, exchange a few words, sadder, happier perhaps, or perhaps only wiser. . . .

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In the autumn they turned south and travelled towards the Basque country. And now an eagerness fell on Perroguet. So grand a circus as Berghoff's would not, he knew, visit a tiny village : yet hope swept him. At last he learned to his delight that they would be passing within a few leagues of Paget Pelvoux.

Perroguet asked Herr Berghoff for a few days' leave. Trembling with sad and happy recollections, he made his way at once to this hamlet which seemed to have bound itself so much with his life.

At last, with an inexpressible joy, he saw the place again ; here his heart could expand, there was one here to whom he could tell indeed the whole story of his sorrow.

Yes, there was Father Dolin still ; older, slower, more benevolent. Perroguet rushed up to him.

The priest listened gravely and with solicitude to the tale, stroking and stroking his grey chin. Alas, indeed there are injustices in the world. Who with eyes in his head could have suspected Perroguet of a murder ? As for the child—had he made enquiries at the Mairies ? Had he asked help from the police ? Had he exhausted the resources of the Sœurs de la Charité pour les Enfants Abandonnés ? They sometimes knew or heard of strange things, they were often the only ones who could help.

All he could do, he had done. "Imagine, Father, twelve years in prison ! I had hope at first, but now sometimes it falters. I wonder. I fear. I think of her, a child, lost, deserted by me. No parents, no home. Thrown on the kindness, perhaps the cruelty, of strangers ! "

"Have comfort, my son. God tempers His wind to the shorn lamb."

"Yet what miseries she may have endured, the little one ! A child of nature, how could she comprehend the arbitrary laws of the world ? She knew nothing, she was innocent as a flower. Could she even have survived at all, so long ? I fear when I think she is alive, and I tremble when I think she is dead. I cannot bear to think of her little body lying somewhere under the cold

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earth. Oh, Father, she wouldn't like cold, she wouldn't like darkness, she would shrink and shrink——”

“ Her mind, my son, is not under the soil. Her spirit is released if she be dead : it is already with the immortals.”

“ She would be lonely all by herself, in that strange company. She is a merry heart, she wouldn't understand the Holy Saints and Fathers. They are old, they are solemn and learned, and scarred with the wounds of their martyrdoms. She would be frightened, my little darling, she would be terrified——”

“ My son ; you love her, you quiver with fear of her unhappiness. Do you not think her heavenly Father, who loves her, will consider this also ? Will He not lend the little Cherubs for her playfellows ? Yes, undoubtedly she will have been transported to Paradise,” said the priest gently. “ How wise, you see, to have had her baptised. But we do not know, my son, that she does not yet live.”

And Perroquet was comforted by this. The calm words, the quiet authority, bearing the whole weight of tradition and unshakable belief, gave him courage and support. How was it possible he had ever scoffed at the Church's dominion ? Yes, one scorned its absurdities, one picked holes, when one was young, ardent, aggressive, when one was weak, lonely, in doubt or sorrow, it stretched out a forgiving hand in succour.

He parted from the good priest, received his blessing, and passed on through the village singing. For meanwhile one had to live, one had to sing and earn money. . . .

“ *Amiez-vous mieux posséder votre maîtresse pendant six ans, à partir du moment où vous lui aurez demandé son amour, et le perdre ensuite : où bien souffrir pendant dix ans avant de le posséder et la garder à tout jamais ?* ”

Réponse : “ *Cardon, sachiez qu'à mon pooor
Avrai mont tost le mieux choisi,
Mont aim mieux longe pain avoir
Que trop hasters m'euist trahi !
Trop seroie désesperez
S'a six ans m'estoie accordez :
Mieux aim dix ans, ou plus languir,
Pour avoir joie sans failir !* ”

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But the ancient songs that had pleased when the century was new seemed now, even to the villagers, stale and boring. Few listened. The musician was quaint, a survival, but not worth spending much time on. Thankfully Perroquet took his few coppers, not caring to recall the rich harvests of old.—How could he know his voice was firm no longer, his bow less commanding, his smile less gay? He thought only of the words of the song. Alas, even they bore, now, too close a significance. . . .

He passed on through the village to the well-remembered spot of fine dry turf bordering the forest's edge. Here he lay, his mind filled with memories. The stream ran there, gaily as ever: all night it flowed through his dreams, mingling with the memory of that bird's voice, heard long since, in a song whose words he could not understand.

The next day he joined the Circus again. They had only moved on a few miles from where he had left them. Standing on a little rise, he looked down on their painted roofs, polished brasses and bright awnings. Yes, he was homeless, too. There, if anywhere, lay his home. He descended the hill.

"The Governor's been asking for you," grinned one of the circus-hands as he approached. "Just got one of his ideas! Wants you to take some part in an animal act. How would you like that, eh?"

"Yes," said Perroquet, who had hardly heard. He turned aside. Another voice now was in his ears.

*"Du bist wie eine Blume,
So hold und schön und rein,
Ich schau' dich an, und Weimut
Schleicht mir ins Herz hinein—"*

Yes, it was this that captured the twin songs of the bird and the rippling stream, that double music of earth and spirit heard so often; this expressed at once the happiness and sadness that mingle for ever where one has loved. . . . The man walked beside him. As they neared the tents they came up to a little group sitting

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round a small fire, smoking, mending their clothes, talking heatedly. Without noticing the new-comers they continued their grumbling chatter.

"When I was a youngster the costumes were circus property, they were looked after by a sewing-woman, she was responsible for the lot ! Now we have to provide our own, gives us more interest, Herr Berghoff tells us, more carefulness. Well, all I can say is, in that case he should raise our money. Certainly we are well paid, but not enough for that. These new-fangled ideas are all very well——"

"And now there's this one," grinned the man, turning to Perroquet. "Wait, let me tell you. An English lady came to the performance last night and instead of applauding she gave papers all round the audience ; and on them was written, what do you think ? That everyone should protest against the cruelties used in menageries and in preparing animals for the Circus ! Berghoff was furious, yes, even he, you should have seen him. He cried then and there, to the whole audience, that no cruelty was possible under his canvas, he would be the first to resent it, all those things were finished with long ago. There was a great tumult, and at last the lady was forced to leave. But he's been deeply thoughtful ever since, the Herr, and as a result, mon vieux, you are to have some special employment, I don't know what. I think he likes your face."

"Well, at least insist on more pay ! Why can't he raise it, too, for all of us ? Does he think we can live and clothe ourselves as well, without money ?—Hey, what about you, old Perroquet ? "

There was a silence. Everyone looked at him. Suddenly, he spoke.

"A soldier had made an excavation in his wooden canteen in which he had packed his doubloons. As he ran out of the house the canteen fell, burst open, all the golden money poured out. Naturally everybody fell on it ; twenty-nine men were shot in this scramble alone, for as they snatched from each other they fell, mortally

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wounded, in the next instant. After this, of course, money was kept in all sorts of places; one kept it in his camp-kettle beneath the stew: and to remove search even farther he used to allow the meat to go bad, but whether it was this badness or the boiling of the metal I never knew, he had terrible pains always and died soon after."

A gloom fell on everybody. "Hey, what sort of a story is that, to tell us?" They looked at him angrily.

A messenger came up asking Perroquet to go to see Herr Berghoff.

The owner indeed appeared anxious and perturbed.

"A most unjust, a most extraordinary accusation has been levelled against us all," he began. "Why people cannot get rid of their antiquated misconceptions I cannot imagine. Everyone knows the world is now run on humanitarian principles. Everyone knows the influences for good have finally routed the bad practices which formerly, possibly, may have existed. But the public is always the last and slowest to get an idea. Well, we have to humour them, direct them, place different suggestions in their minds. Now you, my man, you have the appearance of the highest point of venerability, of kindness, and of dignity; your very presence, assisting at the scene, would help to dispel, I believe, some of these absurd notions. That is why I wish you always henceforth to appear in the arena during the whole of the performance of the animal acts, including those of the big cats. Some small duty will be allotted to you. You will smile, you will look benign, whenever possible you will pat or fondle the creatures, and you will thus perhaps be able to convey to the audience, without words, the truth, as we all know it, that nothing but kindness and good principles are in force here."

This was an order. Under Herr Berghoff's anxious manner, the authority showed itself. Feeling bewildered, Perroquet bowed and left him. The big cats—did he mean the tigers? He knew they were on the Bill, he had never watched their act, they did not interest him.

He wandered off in the direction where he knew they

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lived. One might make their acquaintance, at least. It was already quite dark when he arrived by the cages. As he came near he heard an extraordinary sound—a scuffle, a low icy voice, a swishing as of straw, mingled with moans and heavy breathing.

"And each time you do that I show you who master. You think you big fine man now, eh? I teach you know—"

When he came round the corner the sounds stopped suddenly. There was only Quinchenquo the half-breed, still in his braided coat and tight white-leather breeches of a dompteur, folding the whip he cracked so delicately in his act, and watching the animals being tended for the night. Rising from his knees, where he appeared to have stumbled beside the cages, was a boy. With his back still towards the two men he began at once mechanically to rake the straw over the boards. His head of fair hair showed as palely and as ragged as the straw itself. Perroquet looked at him: His coat was torn in slits as if cut with a knife. Suddenly he saw the boy was trembling.

Well, it was no business of his. The trainer was saying something to him, taking his arm quickly and leading him away towards the supper-tent. A sort of nervous power vibrated from the half-breed, his eye flashed, his tongue ran swiftly. "So, you come help me in my Act? Well, that good. That good for display. Ah, Herr Berghoff clever, right! He know, think all! How good his perfume-sticks for nose of audience. And now you dress up well, pull up grid, eh? That fine. That make Act more grand, if even ten men, so much better! When they see special men to keep grid they shall know, the people, the world, what savage beasts tamed by Quinchenquo! You like that, eh? You, me, friends, eh?—"

They went away into the darkness of the fair-ground.

Hans was left.

The strokes of the lash still burnt into the skin. He

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touched his shoulders tenderly. He had had no food since morning. He was cold, miserable and hungry. He dared not cross the ground to his sleeping-place, he was afraid of running into Quinchenquo, the very look in his eyes made him smart and tremble. There was no one in the whole place with whom he had ever exchanged a dozen words.

He looked around. The night was dark, empty, and without movement. No warmth, no kindness, no friendly life was anywhere. He felt more lonely than ever before. Out of the whole of that dark and bitter world he could distinguish nothing but the faint stripes and the heavy breathing of the big cats.

He opened the cage-door and crept in among the tigers.

It was warm in there. They were all asleep, dead drunk at last on their white powder. One was on its back, its legs crudely extended : two others were huddled in a corner so closely that Lolo's forepaw thrust itself stiffly into her companion's muzzle, causing a lifted fold in the cheek, exposing the gleaming curved teeth in a snarl fantastic in repose. Sultano had his jowl raised upon a neighbour's haunch, over its outline his head appeared with an expression of childish idiocy, or like an amiable alderman with two chins.

Hans came to sleeping with the tigers always on cold nights and when he was unhappy. A deep understanding grew up between them. They, too, had no one to turn to for help. They, too, knew what it was to feel beaten, sore, humiliated. He knew them as friends, fellow-sufferers, dumb victims like himself. He drew comfort from their fortitude as he drew warmth from their bodies. Breathing their breath, sleeping in their straw, his clothes, his hair, all came to stink with the tigers' smell. They began to recognise it : at last they came to think of him as a kind of beast like themselves, but one with power to help their miseries, to bring them food, water, clean straw.

II

So Perroguet lifted the grid each night for the cats' entry into the arena, standing just beside it and looking on, through the whole of the performance. Berghoff was right. His fine, dreaming face, his air of other-worldliness, and his old man's expression of gentle approval, gave a delightful corrective to the scene of the wild beasts. He was a success from the first.

It was about this time, too, that he developed a habit of making enquiries of people whom he passed on the road, especially if they chanced to look travel-worn, or as if they had come from a foreign country.

"Excuse me," he would say in his quiet voice, politely taking off his bonnet, "I wonder if you happen to have seen a child on your travels, a little girl about seven years old? She usually wears a white skirt with spangles on it, bunched out a good deal, and white roses in her hair. In a wreath, as a rule, with a silver ribbon. She would be—oh, let me see, about fourteen or fifteen now. Quite a big girl, in fact. Bright laughing blue eyes she has, and beautiful golden hair. And dressed as I say. Only sometimes, of course, her cheeks are a little green from the moss-pollen. You couldn't fail to notice her."

"I should think not, indeed!" one of them would retort sharply, eyeing the stranger and his enquiry with suspicion; and the other would reply that no, they did not seem to have met anyone of the sort described.

Perroguet would bow again politely, express his regrets for having disturbed them. He would drift off, humming a little air, his head on one side, his mien pensive. "*Du bist wie ei-ne Blu-me—*" The gentle tune was a solace.

Then he would notice a couple resting on a seat before an inn. "I wonder if you could tell me," he would begin with his invariable courtesy, "whether you happen to have seen a little girl lately, dressed in white, with

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a——” And then he would realise it was the same couple he had spoken to a mile or so behind. “ Pardon me,” he would say, backing a little in dismay, “ I—I do not seem to see so clearly nowadays.”

The man and woman would stare without friendliness, and perhaps, later on, warn the police.

But he would turn away, an inner vision before him. A blue sky, a grove of olives and myrtles, a happy crowd eating at little tables among the cobbled streets, clapping their hands and singing . . . (“ *L'Amour, que j'ai toujours fidèlement servi, me récompensera-t-il un jour ?* ”—“ *Assurément, si vous continuez à le servir loyalement.* ”) . . . A message would come from Herr Berghoff that he was neglecting his duties of music on the march. His voice rose bravely above the guitar.

“ *Enfin, de son vil échafaud
Le clown sauta si haut, si haut,
Qu'il creva le plafond de toiles
Au son du cor et du tambour
Et, le cœur dévoré d'amour
Alla rouler dans les étoiles ! . . .*

“ Yes, he's an idea of Herr Berghoff's,” the circus-people would say. “ A character of interest, without doubt. Yes, he was in the Napoleonic wars. Not a soldier exactly. No. But something very important. A spy, I think, of the Duke of Wellington. Yes, either that or one of Napoleon's secret informers. Yes, he's had a lot of adventures, sometimes he speaks of them. There was the time he slew a wolf single-handed ; or was it a bear ? No, I think it was a duel ; it was something very brave and bloody. Anyway, one thing is certain. He was shot in the head at the Battle of Waterloo. That is why—well, you know what I mean,—that is why he looks sometimes a little *queer*. Hush, don't let him hear us speaking of him. Such people, you know, are often ridiculously sensitive.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

I

IN April of 1849 the Circus was in Rome. Encouraged by his successes, Berghoff had broken new ground.

Alas for his plans, for once the time chosen was not the most fortunate. The entire town was in a political ferment. The patriot Garibaldi, with the remnant of his band of countrymen, already defeated at Mortara, closely pursued by the Austrian cavalry, and retreating like a fox from place to place, had taken his stand at last in the Italian capital, carrying his bold front and fair square beard among the inflammable inhabitants.

His power was felt everywhere. The stones of the streets seemed to echo to it. Who would look at the posters of a circus when the whole town was plastered with the proclamation urging the Romans to resist the French? "*Whatever their intentions may be, the salvation of the principle freely adopted by the people, the right of nations, the honour of the Roman name, command the Republic to resist; and resist it will!*" The horse's head coming out of the garland, its bridle held by the flying man (Berghoff's own exquisite design), paled beside this fiery threat.

The city was galvanised with martial ardour. When the French General, Oudinot, advanced upon it with six thousand picked men, determined to take possession of the stubborn fortress, Garibaldi marched out to meet him, laughing already like a conqueror. The French were broken, defeated, forced to fly to Civita Vecchia. This triumph swept the city like a flame. Yet the crowds who rejoiced at this were as nothing to those who possessed the streets like madmen when news came a few

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days later, from Alba Longo, where Garibaldi had crowned his glory with the rout of the other fifteen thousand Neapolitans who had been marching on the capital.

Intoxicated with pride, the people forgot their hero's humiliations, his many times as a refugee. The bells rang, the streets blazed.

But not for long. The magnitude of the victory was in itself a misfortune, the honour of the French flag was at stake, Louis Napoleon could not endure defeat. Reinforced with another six thousand men and with much heavy artillery, General Oudinot was sent once more to attack Rome.

Then began the bombardment of the city. The thunder of the cannon shook the air night and day. The boundary wall on the east bank of the Tiber was attacked continually : the ramparts on every side, built strongly of brick and stone and crested with innumerable towers, shuddered to their foundations ; each of their twelve gates seemed to be assaulted at the same moment. Through the blue sunlit air crashed without intermission the angry demands of the besiegers : from the fortress of Castello Sant' Angelo steadily the guns replied. The ancient theatres and temples trembled to the uproar. From Il Ghetto, the Jews' quarter, in the Rione Saint' Angelo, wails rose continuously towards the Capitol whose walls so often had disregarded suffering. The Corso was deserted ; the anxious townsfolk cowered within their houses : the rich merchants hardly dared fare forth even to negotiate their business, for fear of flying bricks and stones from the walls, or perhaps the whole roof of a house sliding upon them. The soldiers alone marched through the streets, hastening to relieve the weakest parts of the defences.

For Rome could not be taken by assault. Proud as a woman, she drew herself back, untroubled : only when the intruders became too daring she repulsed them. Again and again the attack was beaten off by the forces of Garibaldi : again and again, more subtly or more savagely, it rallied and was renewed.

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The Circus found itself in a pitiable plight. Unsupported by patrons (for none had heart or interest to be amused), it could not even pay for its continued existence. Its site, the old ground of Campus Esquilinus, under the Esquiline hill, which in normal times would have proved excellent and profitable, now was a danger and a burden. The very rent for the ground was a huge sum, due every week. Yet they dared not fly the city—all those men, carts, animals, heavy and slow moving material, how could they hope to pass with safety the walls that were continuously bombarded and on each side of which were ranged determined and ferocious troops?

Herr Berghoff gazed anxiously at his highly skilled and very expensive performers. They looked sulky and indignant. Indeed, it is not pleasant to risk your limbs for a row of empty seats. For some, it is not possible to exist at all—to be daring, to be beautiful, to be funny—without applause. Berghoff, summoning them by the bugle, delivered in his best style an oration on the vicissitudes of life, an exhortation for patience and fortitude: and having, as he thought, brought them to a reasonable conscientiousness, announced the unavoidable reduction of salaries till better times. This was, in itself, a breach of contract, but he hoped that by putting the case intelligently before them, they would see for themselves its necessity. On his way back he passed the big animals whose food had been cut down. Already they had lost condition, their fur stuck out, hollows lay under their hip-bones. They paced their cages angrily, lifting their enormous heads, and echoing with their hungry roars the cannon that thundered over the city.

Their obvious distress was more than Berghoff could stand.

He looked towards the city of Rome. Christians, there, had been the food of lions. Upon their seven hills the buildings clustered: he could pick out a few of them—the Coliseum, the Palatine, the tall Arch of Constantine.—Would even one stone of that eternal city tremble for the

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fate of a circus, however up-to-date? These hills had looked on the Circus when it was born. 'Yes,' thought Berghoff, sadly and yet proudly, 'then the Circus was noble, full of dignity and grandeur, in size like a cathedral, seating four hundred thousand spectators, and filled with the processions of the gods, drawn by leopards, stags, camels or elephants. Then, even the grandest of the patricians engaged in the chariot races, seven times round the arena; the highest priests brought their holy books and offerings; the sons of knights, already armed, glittering in their harness, rode in the magic ring, proceeded by the magistrates of the city and the Senate, and followed by a show of treasures, the spoils of war.—How small, how trumpery modernity seemed sometimes!' thought Berghoff, surprising himself. Of what account the welfare of a few tigers in a city that had seen five hundred lions, at a single Combat of Wild Beasts, slain, with eighteen elephants, in five days?—His mind shrank a little from this savage encounter that had satisfied the barbarity of those times. Yet they, with passion and reverence, had regarded it. "Bread and Circuses!" had cried the people to their Emperors, leading already by their halters the victims which would be sacrificed by the butchers and the priests on the High Altar in the centre of the arena. . . .

'Butchers,' thought Berghoff, pulling himself up in his regretful musings. They, at least, still survived. He made up his mind. Although it was late in the afternoon, he set forth at once towards the city.

The main streets were filled with marshalling troops. He crossed the bridge, making his way with some difficulty to the ancient Campus Martius, where, in the Rione Sant' Eustachio, lived the butchers who supplied his Circus. Crossing it, he looked up. Far away, Trojan's pillar, bearing aloft St. Peter in bronze, four times a man's size, stood out against the evening sky. Inexplicably, this shape of a man, dwarfing himself and his small energetic ideals, filled him with discomfort. It seemed like a threat, too monstrous to grasp, yet plainly to be

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seen, and proclaiming his own essential helplessness. Nervous, and charged with foreboding, he hurried on. The little street smelt evilly, it was ill-paved with stones of lava, and was littered with straw and rubbish.

He summoned his firmness to address the butchers. They, too, must have patience, they must be reasonable, they would all be paid in time. Meanwhile they must, indeed, continue to provide meat to the poor beasts who otherwise would perish.

"Perish?" they cried. "What is that to us? The people of Rome themselves will perish if we cannot keep up their supplies. This donkey and horse meat that we have been giving your menagerie, the people require it now. How can the bullocks come in from the country to be slaughtered with all this going on at the gates? Listen to it! No, I assure you, my good sir, your beasts will certainly not be the first to receive consideration."

This sort of talk would never do. Berghoff rallied all his forces: working in the most approved manner upon their gentlemanly feelings and their incurable optimism, he managed to come to an agreement with them. Greatly pleased with himself, he returned. When he got back he found that two of the tiger-cubs had died of starvation. Refusing to allow this to upset him, he delivered a lecture to all hands on professional pride and the inspiring historical associations for a circus in Rome.

The circus-people were not greatly impressed. To them the whole business seemed merely unlucky, provoking. Why should all this have happened in this town just when they were there? It spoilt everything. But it was not their affair. They looked with indifference at the bodies of troops that marched continually through the city—dusty, tired, and ever more anxious, day by day, as the siege continued: they heard merely with annoyance the reverberations above their heads.

But not so Quinchenquo. It seemed as if the whole strain of the siege was borne on his nerves alone. His whole body throbbed, his mind vibrated to every sound

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of the city's breath, the city that, like a woman, drew herself back, untroubled.

And Netta, lying awake at night, trembled too. As if the continuous attack and repulse and attack outside the walls found its echo in their own hearts and lives, she felt the incessant, insidious assault of Quinchenquo upon the fortress of her will.

'An Indian, a half-breed!' she thought, forcing her contempt, raising herself on one arm in her bunk to stare at the placid, respectable features of her husband. At once into her mind there poured the dark, compelling power, and the hints and promises, and the intoxicating sense of deliverance that came with the man whom she knew most truly to be her mate. His wild and savage imagination, his silent and relentless cunning, his audacious ambition, these conquered her. These, and the cool exploring gaze, the firm exploring hand, and the promise of power, power. . . .

Her contempt turned swiftly towards her husband. Like a sheep he looked, lying there. She saw him, like a sheep, his throat slit, stretched on a butcher's slab, his silly knock-knees tied together with a pink ribbon. Yes, a pink ribbon would just suit him! He who knew nothing of reality; of temper or passion, of hunger or desire, he who cared only for words, and gold paint, and paper flowers, and keeping up a refined taste. With a nice, pretty ribbon he'd be quite happy, even with his throat cut. . . . Yet, what?—how? Quinchenquo had not said much, what had he meant? Dark hints had risen out of the past, laden with crime, cunning, triumphant. Monstrous shadows flapped for a moment and were gone. What had happened could happen again. . . . But Berghoff was strong, not easily killed.—*Killed?* Whatever was she thinking of! What a terrible idea! How had it come to her? What was happening to everything?

Stunned, yet with a racing brain, she threw herself down once more. Never, never, could she admit the half-breed. She must not even speak to him again. His very thought raised evil demons in her mind . . . the very

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thought of being with him alone, free, owners of the Circus, owners of all the money it must bring in . . . able, for once, to be loaded with jewels, to eat well, to speak as you wished, to experience at last, completely, the flesh. . . . Suddenly she saw before her a deep river. Rising in a source unknown, it traversed the vast aboriginal country ; silently and yet with irresistible force it poured itself across the thousands of miles of land, widening itself and deepening, flowing with this immense power, yet unseen, under its hanging creepers and water-growths and dense forests of trees. The light glanced here and there through the branches, it brightened a little movement on the dark shining face. It was Quinchenquo's. The ripples arched his eyes, the lights formed the outlines of his cheek-bones. He was flowing towards her, searching, soaking, penetrating. . . . Under the vision her will dissolved. She lay at last flaccidly, longing only for him.

And in Quinchenquo the nervous tension was extreme. His excitement showed in his glittering eyes, in his unsteady hand. He left the care of the cats more and more to Hans. He did not practise them any longer for their Act ; when its time came he went through it perfunctorily, if they did badly he hardly noticed it. In any case, what did it matter for a few half-empty benches ? His own thoughts centred elsewhere. They were fixed on something so remote as to seem an impossible dream, and yet so near that a few days might see it crowned.

He seldom spoke : when he did he spoke sharply, as if from the torturing ridge of the precipice that divided to-day from the perhaps stupendous tomorrow. Taut and nervously quick, he entered the arena for his performance ; his commands shot through the air like whips : his hand was ever on his pistols.

When it was over, at the given moment Perroguet raised the grid for the tigers' exit ; they bounded away, cracked on by the whip ; in a second their door clanged in the distance : there was a little applause ; Quinchenquo,

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in his braid and white breeches, bowed, streaming with sweat.

When the performances were over, he collapsed. He lay on his hammock, a segar half-lit in his limp yellow hand. It was as if the strain of dragging his thoughts from where they were feeding and forcing them to the attention of the moment had now its revenge. Late in the evening Hans would see him, standing up perfectly naked in his tent, his body a yellow pillar cut off at the forehead by the skull-cap of hair and pierced by the brilliant hollows of the eyes which he blackened with kohl. Here he would stand, motionless, as if by some rite compelling the power to arise within him that would bring its own fulfilment.

Over the still air of the city's night sounded more dangerously near than ever the untiring roar of the besieging cannon.

II

At last, after four weeks' resistance, the stronger force prevailed. The defenders gave out.

On a day of terrific heat the French entered Rome. The patriot Garibaldi, at the head of five thousand faithful, marched for the last time out of the capital he had tried in vain to hold. He marched out with his head high, his incorruptible heart undefeated, his hopes already planning a new encounter. His fearless eyes, ranging the dark horizon, saw not how he marched only towards his desertion by his comrades ; towards unspeakable difficulties, hardships, distresses : to disguises, pursuits, flights in small boats : to the death of Anita, beloved wife.

But the Circus remained. It played to the conquering Frenchmen. They were pleased to laugh at the antics of the Clown, to applaud the ballet, to hold their breaths at the trapezist ; to be entertained by all these charming or death-defying ladies and gentlemen.

The Romans turned out, too ; their anxieties forgotten. The short-lived Roman Republic of a year passed as if it had never been. Every part of the city relaxed now in a joyous ease. The museums, the casinos, the palazzos,

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trembled with hope and pleasure: the painted face of Beatrice Cenci, in the Palazzo Barberino, glowed with an invisible smile. The Piazza del Popolo and the Borghese gardens were thronged all day with happy crowds. The ancient chariot races were revived in the Piazza Navona, whose circular shape exists since the Circus Agonalis: the whole city congregated to witness the horse-races on the Corso, where the horses, without riders, and terrified beyond endurance, were urged to their utmost speed by means of balls and plates of metal bristling with sharp spikes suspended from their backs.

Amid the universal exultation, amid the unthinking cruelty, and delight, and abandonment of the people, the spirit was liberated. Netta felt leaping within her the wild rush of the earth. Not only had the city of Rome fallen to the invader: the inner sanctuary had surrendered too. As if the last culminating victory had thrown her into his arms, Netta felt now only the overwhelming dominion of her lover.

They considered the future. There was nothing to fear: no one would know. A few days to make their plans perfect: then the swift, well-considered act. Neither of them had intimates among the circus-folk. Quinchenquo dealt with none during the day but a dumb, stupid boy whom he hated, and a half-crazy old man. Appachio had left some time since. No one would watch or notice their movements, or suspect a conspiracy. Nevertheless, with his unfailing cunning, Quinchenquo took trouble to speak often to Perroguet in terms of highest praise and affection of Berghoff: and to try and draw him out on the subject of the recent political events, as if they were the only ones of any importance.

But Perroguet let these things pass over his head like a flock of pigeons. A phrase from Berghoff's speech clung in his mind. Bread and Circuses. For that was the same idea that haunted him so often. Strange how it cropped up continually, here and there, ancient and modern. . . . Fuel for the body, fuel for the mind. Something to live

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by, something to laugh by. For food alone did not satisfy man : it was like all work and no play : his spirit, too, craved something to admire, to wonder at—it needed the eternal spectacle of courage and beauty ; yes, this was necessary for the soul as bread for the mortal frame. The twin voices of the earth and the spirit mingled in that Romish phrase.—Dimly he groped his way among these thoughts. He saw no longer clearly, at one blow, as of old. He felt the mearing of his thoughts in the fibres of his body, no longer reasoned them in the bright channels of the brain. A deep linking-up of innumerable floating, disconnected ends seemed apparent to him : the bird, the stream, the bell of the cathedral, the song of Heine. . . . From the confused consciousness of his thoughts he looked up, seeking in some way to give them utterance : to no audience, but only to his inner ear, who alone was left that understood him. All at once his words froze. Suddenly, it seemed to him, he had seen Hili.

It was only the flash of the golden hair of the boy, Hans. He passed, bearing the water-bucket, his feet dragging as if from weariness, or pain. How different the step of the dancing child ! Perroquet raised his eyes to the blue sky ; as if recalled by some contour, by some intangible memory, there was her face again, stamped on the limpid air, her blue eyes sparkling in a gay youthful promise.

" I am an old man now, Hili, my darling. I am tired. I am lonely. I cannot speak always only to myself. Nobody used to listen to me so patiently as you, ever, even in the past. Do you remember as a baby, before you could understand, you listened to me, you understood ? Now my thoughts turn upon themselves, there is no focus in them but you, there is no one to care for, there is nothing to live for. And I have waited so long. Could you not come back to me, now ; at last ? "

The water swirled over the boards of the cages, the bucket clanked as it was put down empty. Quinchenquo saw at last that Perroquet had not heard one word of what he had been saying. He turned away in disgust and gave a sharp order to Hans.

III

Everyone was excited by the return of prosperity.

The good Herr Berghoff bustled about, busier than ever, full of respectability and importance.

Several new Acts were introduced in the Programme. Ladies with voluptuous bosoms reclined in classical draperies representing the Seasons, the Virtues, the Nations. A pole was brought into the arena surmounted by a small platform covered in red velvet with a gold fringe, a ladder accompanied it, both smothered with flowers, mirrors and gilt lanterns. La France climbed to the top of the pole ; reached the platform ; posed : the tumult of applause set the striped roof swaying. Amid the plaudits of the French resounded the derisive yells of the others. Quickly France descended : Italy rose, posed : each Nation followed in turn, thus everyone in turn was delighted : it began to be seen that one should not consider the Nations but admire only the differing beauties of the ladies. These were well received : even England. And Berghoff had a further surprise—the English language itself, introduced in a new Act of the Clown. With wings fastened to his arms and a yellow cloth round his body, the Clown comes buzzing into the arena. An Indian (the slack-rope walker) accosts him : "'Oney-bee, 'oney-bee, what for you come from the 'ive ?'" The Clown crouches, bending over, his posterior extended. In this position, at the end of the question, he is kicked : he rolls head-over-heels, over and over, back to his hive ; each time his tail touches the ground the drums in the band make a noise like the thundering drone of bees. Nothing more futile than this Act could be imagined. The audience adored it. All the children clapped ecstatically, awaiting with rapture the expected impact of boot on bottom. Even the elders looked on complacently, with indulgent smiles.

This was followed by the artistes from the Cirque de Paris. Preceded by a placard borne round the ring printed "L'Art Hippique," their horses danced slowly,

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with intricate convolutions, to music. This was a very difficult feat, seldom appreciated by the audience; Berghoff, as an artiste himself, insisted on having it. Then followed the famous Cheval Aéronaute. The last was superb. Ascending from canvas clouds rayed with the light of rising suns, a platform looped with gold braid supported a man on horseback, the whole suspended from a gigantic silk sausage filled with air, from whose ends tassels flew. Carefully painted with black, the ropes sustaining the sausage were invisible. Last, always, came Quinchenquo and his tigers.

How much he would have liked to exhibit, before this crowd, *Le Repas des Animaux!* That might yet come, in time. At present he was stalking higher game than a mob's applause.

For now it was the last week of the Circus in Rome. All the plans of the pair had focussed upon it.

As if to aid their schemes, fortune had caused Berghoff to conceive at the last moment a new, superlative idea. When the last of the crowd left he was still busy half the night directing the carpenters.

"How can I rest in this incessant clangour?" cried Netta. "Let me at least have my caravan moved to the other side of the ground. Better the breath of the cats than this head-splitting hammering!" She trembled as she saw Fate place its golden hand in her lap. She trembled as she saw how all too easily, now, it could be done. . . .

She trembled as the swift silent form that she loved, that she hated, that she feared, and that she clung to, entered, in the darkness, her caravan.

They had their moment, those two. In Netta's mind who knows what raptures of release, of revenge, in his what dreams of triumph and power? Within a short call of Respectability they gave themselves to their desire.

Coming forth from the van, Quinchenquo met Hans. Hans, who slept beside the beasts, though none knew it, was creeping, tired and silent, to his rest.

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Like a shadow Quinchenquo slipped past. In a second his mind was whirling with agitated thoughts.—Had he seen him? What was he doing there? His sleeping-place was somewhere else, under a wagon on the other side. It was an accident, a chance meeting, better say nothing.

His whole future and Netta's rested upon wariness. Yet, supposing Hans had seen him, he might wonder. . . . He wouldn't tell Berghoff, he was too stupid; he was, besides, too frightened. But perhaps, who knows, somehow he might blurt out something. What an accursed encounter!—Quivering with a nervous fury, Quinchenquo slunk through the darkness to his own tent. The memory of Netta's lips hung upon him, loading him with forgetfulness of all else: yet the main part of his business was still to do. It needed skill, alertness, courage: one slip and all might yet be lost.

The next day passed in a dream. Voices, sunshine, meals, these swept along blurred like milestones, reflecting only the inner urgency, bringing only again the desired shadows of night.

This time he waited, Quinchenquo, in the darkness beside the cages, like a jaguar, that before breaking cover crouches in watch, with nothing moving but its yellow eyes. No one was in sight. This part of the ground was deserted. No one came near the tigers after nightfall. The caravan stood up, alone, a dim oblong; its door was open. . . .

He looked all round again, on coming out. The night was darker but as empty. He slipped down the steps without noise and across the few yards of grass to the shelter of the cages. Suddenly, he came face to face with Hans. The boy was standing upright, staring, his eyes hazed with sleep, on his face a look of startled apprehension. For a second they both stood, dumb with shock. The next instant a gathering rage whirled through Quinchenquo like a flame. So: the boy spied on him. The boy guessed. The boy had been there, watching. The boy had his secret.—A desire to annihilate blazed through him, to destroy this witness for ever. Above his head, on the

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wall, hung the long steel-lined whip. It lashed through the air once, twice, again. Foaming, sweating, raging with fear and fury, he slashed at Hans who had fallen to his knees. The boy raised his arms before his face in dumb and bewildered pain. The words came to him dully. "Do you hear, do you hear what I saying to you? Ah, you fear me, you know that. You slave: you obey. Listen! You do not speak one word of seeing me. You have not seen me here, you understand that? If you tell one word what you have seen, I will beat you, I will burn you, I—I will skin you alive! You know me, I master. So then, remember, that is what you must not do. See, I will make you not forget."

With all his strength he struck Hans across the temple with the heavy butt-end of the whip.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE inside of the large tent under the canvas roof is filled with a thick, yellow and lighted air : above it, for millions of miles, the dark night stretches, bearing the planetary systems, the strange moons and stars of other worlds, dissolving finally into the measureless and unknown spaces.

Within the tent everything is super-polished, everything glitters superlatively. Feathers, spangles, gauze, assume a vibrating animation of their own : the plumes and jewels of the liberty-horses shine more exotically triumphant than ever : the silken tights of the acrobats glow with more radiant arrogance. Under the huge dome of the darkness dwell fiercely the naphtha-flares, the limelights, and the blaring of the band.

The reason of Herr Berghoff's excessive exertions is already evident : on this, the last night of its performance in Rome, the Circus is honoured by the presence of a very great personage indeed.

The performance is in full swing. The Clown comes buzzing into the arena : his arms with their draperies flap up and down. In the intense brilliance of the light every grain of powder shows, raised like a hillock, on his face ; the triangular red patches on his cheeks shine, glossy with grease and sweat ; his eyes are glittering black and thick with paint, the eye-lashes heavy, matted together. His grin causes great cracks to appear in the grained, chalk-white surface of his plastered skin : wrinkles, heavily enforced, radiate from his eyes. The very light on his eyes is mocking : it falls true : this seems unreal in these fantastic painted darks and shades. His eyeballs are bloodshot : their

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dirty yellow thrusts his humanity brutally into the scene.

"'Oney-bee, 'oney-bee, what for you come from the 'ive ?'" The Clown crouches, bending over. Crash, bang, slap ! The Clown's bottom is kicked. Brrrrrrrrr comes from the drums before the gaudy uniforms : shrieks of delight from the crowded tiers. The Clown retires to the dressing-tent and wipes his face which is burning from the sweat that cannot escape through the paint. He takes out from his enormous pantaloons the felt padding which has kept him from hurt. He begins to change into his next costume. . . .

Already the arena is filled by the horsemen from the Cirque de Paris : received as usual with politely mechanical applause. After them the Swedish gymnasts, their muscles rippling, leap into the lighted ring : the trapezist, who is to follow, stands even now ready, waiting, in the entrance. Swiftly the changes flash and go in the brilliant haze that fills the tent : the scenes of tinsel sway like a dream before the gaping crowd. . . .

Fear was the one emotion that was constant. That, really, underlay it all. . . . Fear of falling, fear of being hurt, fear of losing one's job, fear of getting fat, fear of losing lovers, fear of less applause . . . fear of hunger, cold . . . fear of old age, of feebleness, of not being wanted, of dying in the end, after all. Fear stung their cheeks to a richer hue, brightened their eyes, braced their muscles.

It found itself also in Hans.

All day his head had ached unbearably, a pulse within it beating out the moments like a huge hammer pounding deafeningly upon an anvil. All day his mind had groped unhappily in a world that held neither sense nor reason.

There was something he must not do. There was something which, tonight, he must not do. If he did it he would be skinned alive. A-a-a-a-h !—skinned alive ! O-o-o-o-h ! He knew what it was to be skinned. Old

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Mustapha, he who had died that year of the cold, he had been skinned by Quinchenquo and now this skin lay on his bed. So would his own skin lie perhaps, if . . . How his head ached ! The pain seemed to come in from the outside at the place where he had been hit, and to whirl round and round like a rat in a trap, unable to find again the place of exit. Yet it was plain he must be very careful : for there was something he must not do tonight. If only the noise and the clapping would cease, he might be able to sit down and rest for a moment : and then, perhaps, he might be able to remember what it was that he must not do. . . .

But the hours had passed, and still he could not recollect it. Now it was nearly time to get the animals ready for their Act.

This task for months past had been left solely to him. With his usual mechanical precision he went through the ritual.

The sideboards were raised ; the full blast of the band and the noisy crowds burst upon the ears of the tigers. They rose, they stretched, they knew their hour was upon them, they began to walk up and down, swinging their tails. One by one the gratings between the cages were slipped out, all the animals were herded into one small compartment ; this had shafts like a carriage, and between them already stood Francesca, the strong white mare. She drew the cage along the track that led to the short barred passage into the steel arena. Here she was released ; with the harness still on her back she trotted off, without needing an order, to her own stable. And here the tigers waited till the moment came for their work. Here they waited, shivering, their senses mounting in excitement and fear.

From within the tent terrific applause announced the conclusion of Herr Berghoff's new Act, the one which, rehearsed only twice, had been laid like an offering before the Last Night. It had gone well ; Herr Berghoff would be pleased. Dimly these thoughts reached Hans. His mind was still searching for what it had lost. So far, no

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prohibition had occurred to him. His tasks were nearly done. Yet there was something he must not do. . . .

At the last, at the very last moment, it was his duty to give the animals water. Crowded in a small space, hot, anxious, excited, they could be counted on to lap their bowls up entirely.—Within the water the white powder was dissolved. Quinchenquo had worked it out long ago, with care : it needed just so much to last so long that the final trick could be performed and the animals could get away before they collapsed entirely into a drugged lethargy : and Hans, with his undeviating exactness, he who asked no questions, could be trusted to administer this without fail. Night after night he had done so.

Suddenly, just as his hand was tipping the powder into the measure, a thought flashed through him. Without reasoning, he paused, exultant. Of course, no doubt, it was this which he must not do!—Immensely relieved, he gave the water but no powder. The tigers lapped it up, greedily as ever. He watched them with gratitude and pride. Now, perhaps, his head would be satisfied ; now, perhaps, it would cease hurting and hammering ! . . .

The hammering was only the noise of the barred arena being set up : the knocking was only the crowd applauding the clowns that meanwhile ambled about the circus-track. The lights, the scented sticks, the bunches of jungle foliage were fixed to the iron bars. A low whistle sounded : the clowns, with exaggerated alarm, fled away out of sight.

Quinchenquo bounded into the arena. His braided coat and white leather breeches flashed in the lights which were turned full upon him. His dark face glowed with a desperate bravado and insolent vanity. He bowed, sweeping up into himself all the tremors of the people, all their expectation, their wonder at himself, dompteur of wild beasts. The light coming on him through the bars striped him already with the tigers' livery.

First he felt, quickly, mechanically, that his pistols were in his belt—one charged with ball, one blank ; and

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in the next instant he lifted his whip and cracked it. The tall form of Perroguet entered the arena : he raised the steel grid at the side ; the next moment the tigers had leapt through the opening one after the other, and bounded forward, each to his own stool in the semicircle. Quinchenquo faced them. He gave his orders. One, two, three ; the cats obeyed him. They sprang clearly and strongly through the iron hoops ; they landed with ease and lightning grace. Something unusual in their behaviour struck his mind almost at once. What could it be ? A sense of lightness, freedom—yes, free will. . . . What was it ? What was happening ?

There was no time to think. His eyes had to be everywhere ; his orders had to follow without intermission : the whole attention of the cats had to be focussed upon the dominance of his power. They sat up on their stools, each jumping down when his name was called to take his place on the ladder. They stood on the ladder one behind the other, posing in a constrained attitude ; they leapt from the ladder to the tiny platform. From here each had to spring through the iron hoop flaming with lighted tow, the Ring of Fire. Quinchenquo watched them narrowly. A sense of something alarming swept again through his trainer's mind—alarming and incomprehensible.

Bella went through it first, as usual ; nothing ever disturbed her. Konrad, already on the platform, refused to follow. The trainer flicked him on the quarter. He turned and snarled savagely. Quinchenquo struck him in the face. With a flashing circular motion he clawed at the thong, hissing. Bengali jumped down from the ladder and began to slink behind, pressing herself against the bars. Quinchenquo whipped her up at once : she bounded again on to her stool, hissing and swaying. He cut her on the nose with his lash. Alexander went through the hoop. Sultano was next.

Sultano looked at him. Suddenly the half-breed saw a light flicker across the wide-open eyes : he knew at once that Sultano offered a defiance for the first time in the

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arena.—He flicked him, too, across the muzzle with his loaded whip. He shouted his order in a sharp tone. Night after night Sultano had obeyed him.

And Sultano looked at his enemy. To his amazement he saw him clearly, standing there, with no bars between them. The whole accumulation of the rage and pain of months blazed in his yellow eyes : motionless he stared ; under the fur that hid his wide skull huge savage thoughts whirled. His muscles flexed : he drew in his breath : the tip of his tail switched to and fro. "Jump !" ordered Quinchenquo, and raised his whip.

Sultano leapt into the air, his mouth open, his limbs extended : with a roar like the heavens collapsing, he charged full at his enemy. Quinchenquo sprang aside, he turned, swift as a snake, and cut Sultano deeply across the flank. The beast cowered—bewildered, lost ; his charge had missed, he was frightened.

An instant, terrific disorder arose among the others. They growled, hissed, roared, sprang over each other in confusion. Two were fighting with each other already, spurred by strangeness and terror.

Cries of dismay shrilled at once from the audience. The attendants shouted to each other. No one seemed to know what to do. Within a minute there was uproar on all sides, adding to the bewildered fury of the beasts. Their voices rose, more clamorous ; the moment was enlarging swiftly into something fantastic, incredible—

At that moment Hans ran in through the cats' entrance. He ran straight up to them, spoke to them, urgently commanded them. They smelt him, they knew him, they turned at his voice, quieted. He brought them comfort, he would deliver them again from this danger and doubt. . . . As if by magic his presence relieved them ; they stood looking at him, for a second, silently.

At the sight of this boy, daring to enter the arena, showing in an instant, too, before the crowds, his true power over the wild beasts, an insane jealousy racked Quinchenquo. *He* was the master, *he* ! He shouted an order angrily, to claim once more the attention.

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At that sound, Sultano sprang. Death was in his eyes. This time there should be no mistake. Hans saw it. Without reason, without thought except to defend his human master, he leapt also, he threw his body broadside at Sultano to divert his charge. The two rolled over in the sawdust. That look of death Quinchenquo had seen too. Quick as light he drew his pistol. The two bodies seemed a hidden blur, the others were leaping round them. Man and beast they swayed and struggled (Hans striving to keep the angry tiger cornered); into that tumult Quinchenquo feared to shoot, in that confusion a shot might hit anyone. A sudden, cunning thought swept him! What if he did hit Hans? Well rid of him! Hans had his secret!—At that moment Sultano leapt free. There was a flash, a tremendous report. Hans dropped to his knees. The whole air was shaken, a thin blue trail of smoke drifted across the arena. At the sudden, splitting crack all the animals had fallen back. Quinchenquo seized the second's advantage. He lashed his whip instantly behind them: at the same moment the door was raised, the tigers flew out through the opening. No one was left but Quinchenquo, dripping with sweat, and Hans, still on his knees.

Herr Berghoff, who had been dancing with dismay and anxiety, not knowing what had gone wrong, not knowing what would be the upshot, hustled into the arena between the lights and flowers. He trotted over to Hans and luggered him up. (Foolish fellow, over-powered by the noise of the pistol!) Quinchenquo seized his other arm. They bowed. Hans bowed between them.

The audience were enchanted beyond measure. It was all, then, a brilliant manœuvre! For a moment they had almost thought— But, of course, that was impossible. What a wonderfully spectacular conclusion to an excellent evening's entertainment! They flung at them a hurricane of plaudits.

Quinchenquo looked across at Berghoff. Yes, this was the man whom he—whose wife he . . . Hans wasn't

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bowing very well. Quinchenquo pushed him down, placing one hand on his back. It came back wet. He cursed inwardly under his smile. A flicker-ripple from the agony in his breast crossed the face of the solemn youth. The audience was wild. Even he, then, could appreciate applause!

They rose in their seats. Berghoff raised a deprecating hand asking for silence. He still had his speech to make, thanking the city for their magnificent patronage during the happy stay of the Circus in Rome, and more especially and in particular to thank the Very Exalted Personage for his presence there tonight. . . .

Just outside the tent-wall Hans collapsed. They put him on to a strip of canvas and carried him away from the crowd.

Perroguet went beside him. His whole brain was quivering with some emotion he could not grasp: as if stirred, unaccountably, by the approach of some tremendous explanation. The noise, the shot, the meaningless uproar, and now this stricken boy: they mingled in a web woven also with the past. He felt more confused than ever before.

He knelt on the grass beside the still body, the lantern's light flickered over it. All at once the face of his beloved seemed to float there. The pain of Hans, his fainting pallor, washed from his face his toils, his sex. His eyelids fluttered. His blue eyes looked out with a wondering innocence under the fallen lock of pale gold. "Mother, come to me. Nordsig! Hili!" murmured the dying boy.

Perroguet sobbed. A world of light suddenly flooded round him.

"Hili! At last. Hili, my love! my darling!"

The men drew away. "Hah! Dreaming of some amour! Disgusting. The old man!"

Perroguet just heard them. He drew the gold head towards him tenderly. "Nothing is disgusting, nothing!" he whispered. A film came out of the past and wound its memories around him.

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A few words faltered from the quiet form.

"Where am I? What has happened to me? Where
have I come?"

"My darling. Can't you see? You have come home."